



PO Box 12 Bellbowrie Q Australia 4070
T +61(07) 3376 0933 F +61(07) 3376 0944
E info@swimaustralia.org.au W www.swimaustralia.org.au

How long before my child can swim?

Learn to swim programs are expected to meet many needs, not the least of which is teaching children to swim. Parents want to see tangible results from lessons to assure progress is being made and that they are receiving value for their money. Sometimes lessons can feel like a treadmill with no clear end in sight. This uncertainty about a definite timeline can leave parents wondering when their child will ever “complete” the task of learning to swim.

Following are some considerations if you have ever found yourself asking, “how long will it take” or “haven’t they learned to swim yet?”

With swimming lessons there can sometimes be a belief – that a child will take some lessons, learn to swim and then be finished. Such an “event based” mentality can be a dangerous assertion to make.

A realistic way to approach swimming lessons is as a long-term process. Attending lessons as a regular part of a child’s weekly routine through their infant, preschool and early school years is a great plan to ensure proper development of their aquatic skills. Along the way, a child should be allowed to learn at their own pace, practicing skills appropriate to their developmental level.

So the question then often arises, how often should I attend lessons each week? While progress may be accelerated in the short term by attending lessons more often, a regular and consistent approach will often yield the best results. Towards this end, attending once a week through the year would be better than attending every day of the week for a month or two and then stopping for a long period. This is in line with the way children learn and how well they retain skills. There won’t always be leaps of progress every lesson or every week. It is normal for learning to plateau for periods, even regress at times and surge ahead at others. The once per week class allows skills to be maintained and for progress to be made over time.

Some periods of twice per week classes or holiday intensives can boost achievement. The important thing to consider is that more intensive lesson attendance can become exclusive of other activities and can’t often be kept up long term. This may result in lessons being stopped. Again, it is better to keep the lessons up, even if only once per week, than stop them entirely. Swimming lessons for children under 6 or 7 years should be a consistent, year round activity building toward a lifelong skill of proficient swimming.

So, when do lessons stop? While every program will have their own goals, a general idea for parents to consider is for their child to be capable of swimming 400 metres (with good technique, without stopping and without becoming exhausted). That level of skill may take years to reach, but establishes a strong foundation and children over 7 years should retain those skills. However, reaching this goal doesn’t mean a swimmer should leave the pool. It is still important to keep up the skill, continue to improve and consider the wide range of aquatic sports that will be fun, challenging and beneficial into the future.

Swimming lessons are not just another option on the list of activities for children, along with soccer, dance, gymnastics, etc. They are an invaluable life saving activity offering many benefits for the learner and for the more accomplished swimmer.

Enjoy your swimming, every stroke of the way!

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AFFILIATIONS

