

Training and Technique



Out in the Open SUITING UP:

The Pros and Cons of Wearing a Wetsuit

To wetsuit or not to wetsuit? Most people have an opinion. To help clarify the choice, we've rounded up some of the most common reasons for and against the use of the neoprene wonder that's become a staple for many swimmers the world over.

OF COURSE I WEAR ONE! HOW ELSE WOULD I DO THESE CRAZY SWIMS?

- It's no secret that wetsuits improve a swimmer's buoyancy, and for triathletes and swimmers with legs that tend to sink, a little extra buoyancy often means a higher ride in the water and a smoother stroke. The added speed could mean you can finally keep up with those faster swimmers you want to train with.
- A thin layer of neoprene can help you enjoy waters that might otherwise be too cold, broadening your swimming horizons and expanding your love of the sport. In addition to new geographies, wetsuits can also extend your season in both directions, putting April and October back on the open water swimming calendar, even in northern climes.
- Beyond heat retention, wetsuits can also provide protection from the sun and abrasive salt water. They can even keep some biting critters such as sea lice out of your business, allowing you to enjoy your time in the water more.
- For some events, wetsuits are required, so even if you prefer not to wear one, you may have to. Sorry, race director's (and the insurance company's) rules!
- A well-fitting wetsuit can make just about any swimmer—no matter how novice—look like a sleek and experienced pro.

NAH, I'M A TRADITIONALIST. IT WORKS FOR SHAMU, SO I'LL STICK TO SKIN AND BLUBBER.

- The organizing bodies behind most of the marquee marathon swims, such as the English Channel, specifically state that the use of a wetsuit will invalidate a swim and render it listed with an asterisk as an "assisted" swim. So, no matter how cold the water is, if you want to get official credit for completing an event that enforces English Channel rules, you'll have to go without the neoprene.
- For some swimmers, the added buoyancy can actually be detrimental, setting up imbalances that result in bad habits and injury. Restrictive by design, wetsuits also prevent some swimmers from achieving full range of motion in their shoulders. This can put harmful stress on delicate joints and slow progress.
- Wetsuits don't always fit properly, especially if you're not built like a professional triathlete. A too-large suit loses a lot of its thermal properties, as cold water constantly flushes out the trapped water that provides much of the magic warmth.
- Even when they fit properly, wetsuits nearly always cause chafing at seams and along the back of the neck, which can cut your workout short and leave you with ugly abrasions for days to come.
- Even on a very long swim, you lose some of the macho factor if you choose to wear a wetsuit. It's just not as hard to persevere inside a wetsuit, unless the water is very warm.

Although the choice of attire may be in question, to swim or not to swim never should be.—ELAINE K. HOWLEY

