Ocean Swimming

Ocean swimming is different from swimming in a pool: You have to watch out for currents, waves, and other natural dangers. Use these safe tips for ocean swimming.

Ocean Swimming Basics

First things first: Strong swimming skills are essential in the ocean's unpredictable environment. Never go into the ocean if you can't swim. Also learn:

- **Where to swim.** Always swim in a designated ocean swimming area supervised by lifeguards. Stay close to shore so you can be seen and rescued quickly if needed.
- **When to swim.** Daytime is the safest time for ocean swimming. Visibility is low in early morning hours and at dusk, and predatory animals in the water tend to move closer to shore at night.

Ocean Swimming Risks

The ocean is a complex body of water with some natural dangers. Before swimming away from shore, understand these hazards:

- **Rip currents** are narrow channels of fast-moving water. Instead of fighting them, swim parallel to the shore with the current, and angle yourself slowly back to land.
- **Large waves** are more powerful than you might think. Dive under one before it breaks. And remember: Never turn your back to the ocean when you're in the water. Rogue waves or undertow can happen at a moment’s notice.
- **Shore breaks** happen when a wave breaks on land, which can knock swimmers down. To avoid serious injury, stay away from beaches with rocky outcroppings or a steep slope into the water.
- **Inshore holes** are long trenches that run parallel to the beach. They can surprise waders who are expecting shallow water. Make sure your students can swim, and stay with them in any water.

**Remember:** A sunny day doesn't necessarily mean great ocean swimming conditions. Check your local surf forecast before heading to the beach to know what to expect.