

## FAQ'S

### Learn to Swim for babies

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#### **1. When should I start teaching my baby to swim?**

Young babies have a natural affinity with water; in fact they often relax more in the water than when out of the water. It makes sense to use this positive relationship and expose your baby to a warm, secure, water environment as soon as possible after birth.

Begin with warm, quiet, soothing bath time. Make the bath as deep and warm as is comfortable for you and baby. Talk to your baby; sing to them; maintain close eye and skin contact; feed, caress and massage them; sway them through the water supporting while on their back, and also on their tummy with chest and chin resting gently in your hands. Very young babies need stimulation but beware not to overload the senses. Focus on one activity at a time, regularly changing the position and type of stimulation.

Aim to start your baby in a quality swimming program from around 6 months. Your baby should be immunized and in good health before commencing. If your baby was premature check with your doctor first.

From as early as 10 months your baby may start becoming wary of unfamiliar people and places. By 18 months babies are developing an imagination and may even start waking after bad dreams. To prevent the possibility of water related fears, it is important to expose your baby to regular pool sessions in a playful, secure environment well before this stage.

Babies who swim from an early age are relaxed and confident in the water and avoid the emotional stress that may come when starting later. From as early as 6 months babies can safely and happily enjoy shared water experiences with their parents in a quality baby swim program.

*"A good aquatic program will educate parents to start activities in the bath with their baby from birth. In this safe water environment a very young baby who still has little voluntary movement on land can start to experience a wide range of movement-with lots of wonderful stimulating sensations, all of which reinforce the learning process. Once baby is old enough to move into the group programs at the pool (usually from 6 months) the social aspect adds another new and wonderful dimension."*

#### **2. What can my baby learn in a structured lesson?**

When prepared gently and consistently, very young babies quickly learn the cues for going underwater. They will submerge comfortably and happily, enjoying the magic of short underwater expeditions. Initially an experienced teacher will guide you when allowing your

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baby underwater. You will learn to read your baby's posture and facial expressions, don't be surprised if your baby is ready before you!

Some other important skills your baby will learn include:

- Confident enjoyment in and under the water
- Independent and unaided movement through the water
- Jumping in, turning underwater and swimming back to the wall for safety
- Reaching up to a high wall and climbing out
- Holding a pool wall and negotiating along it to steps or shallow water
- Relaxation in the back floating position
- Popping up to breathe in order to see the wall and swim longer distances
- Realistic awareness of swimming ability without floatation aids
- Important safety rules, such as never entering the water with- out an adult watching

### 3. Are there other benefits from my baby swimming?

A quality, play based, aquatic education program can offer lots of stimulation (physically, socially and intellectually) to enhance the development of your child.

Swimming is also a wonderful life skill. It will eventually develop into activity, perhaps even sporting opening many wonderful opportunities.

Perhaps most importantly, baby swimming is an education for both you and your child. You will learn how to continue your child's aquatic education outside of lessons, and to make the most of your time in the water together. The bonding and trust that will develop between you and your child as you share water experiences and learn together will be something to treasure for the rest of your lives.

We often refer to a young baby as "taking it all in"-and it is obvious to many parents (as well as child development experts) that this is precisely what the baby does from the moment it is born. The colour, movement and smiling faces (in the pool) are very strong stimulators to develop baby's vision, and the music, rhythm, laughter, splashing and variations in voice tone further stimulate baby's brain. From birth children are carefully watching adult faces to imitate, and the more often they're exposed to happy, smiling, positive social interaction the more positively they will develop in their own social and interpersonal skills. The most powerful potential enhancer of baby's development is in the area of skilled movement and co-ordination. The water environment provides invaluable sensory information for the development of good movement and co-ordination skills. By exposing the young child to a range of stimulating, safe, and age appropriate sensory experiences, we aim to enhance and extend the development of the child.

### 4. Are all swim programs safe for my baby?

To ensure a safe environment for your baby, pools must be warm (between 30 and 34 degrees) and very clean. Programs must be designed and delivered by teachers who understand the development of young children and the importance of teaching skills in a positive and consistent way.

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If a swimming program places your baby under stress (physically or emotionally), negative associations with water or swim lessons may develop. Programs must be gentle, playful, and in tune with your babies needs to ensure progress is achieved safely and happily.

#### 5. Can learning to swim save my child's life?

There are many cases where very young children have fallen into pools and swum back to safety. However children are unpredictable and there is no guarantee they will remember, constant supervision is vital.

Babies who have been in lessons with their parent and without the use of floatation aids are less likely to enter a pool without an adult. They will have a more realistic awareness of their own swimming ability and will have practiced a variety of skills to get back to safety if they fall in.

Teachers and parents work closely together to teach skills in a happy and playful atmosphere so that if your child finds himself accidentally submerged he will be relaxed and buoyant. He will then have a better chance of remembering and using the skills he has practiced during lessons. Turning back to the wall and swimming to safety is an achievable survival skill which requires calm clear thinking.

How these recovery skills are taught is very important. Teach your child appropriate recovery (survival) skills, and then do everything in your power to ensure they don't need to use them.

#### 6. What training should baby swim teachers have?

This may be the first educational program for you and your baby. You need a teacher who is highly trained, experienced and mature-one who has the ability to teach both you and your baby.

Anyone teaching aquatics to children less than 5 years should hold the AUSTSWIM Infant and Preschool certification. All swimming teachers at TRAC are accredited with Austswim and are trained in our unique program. They are kept abreast with the latest developments in infant swimming from around the world.

#### 7. What do classes involve?

Both you and your baby will be placed in a class with other babies around the same age. The class will be a maximum of 8 so that you receive all the attention and individual tuition you need, the class will run for 30 minutes.

Play equipment including floating mats, toys and mirrors will be used to motivate your baby to extend their skills. Specifically designed games and activities will develop confidence, teach important skills, and have your baby asking for more!

Young children are more comfortable when they know what to expect and they learn through playful repetition. As your baby progresses the activities will be modified to become more challenging. The atmosphere will be relaxed and positive for both you and your baby. Your teacher will guide you as you learn and practice new skills together.

#### 8. How long will it take?

Young children learn quickly, however they are just as quick to forget! They need regular revision and practice (at least once a week) to retain skills and progress.

Of course babies are unique and learn at their own individual pace. They all plateau (or regress) occasionally. Continue with lessons and stay positive as your baby fully absorbs their new skills.

As your child grows swimming skills will also develop and extend. There is no end-point to the process. You are embarking on a journey that begins with water confidence and will lead to a respect for water safety and a love of swimming that will remain for life!

#### 9. What else can I do to help?

Play with your child in a warm pool or bath. Make it fun! If you relax then they will relax. Encourage your child to play under a sprinkler and to have a shower.

Get ready for going underwater by pouring a small amount of water over your child's head while saying our cue, "Name Ready Go". Use your hand washer or a play watering can keeping your actions slow, confident and gentle. A playful approach works best.

Be positive and relaxed. Like any new experience the first days can be daunting. If your child is upset, reassure with a cuddle, a happy face and lots of eye contact. If they need some space feel free to take some toys to a quiet corner. Remember to rejoin the group as soon as your child is happy again.

Use positive language and maintain a watchful but relaxed attitude near water. Avoid terms like "dangerous" or "drown". Young children are very in tune with the facial expressions, body language and choice of words used by their parents. If you are anxious near water consider some classes for yourself to improve your confidence and skills.

Enroll in a resuscitation course. Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA) resuscitation courses for the parents of young children.

#### 10. What makes TRAC different?

- Small class sizes with a maximum of 8 in mums and bubs.
- We have heated, clean water at 32-34 degrees.
- We have baby change facilities and plenty of room for prams.
- We provide outstanding and highly qualified teachers, who are experienced and mature. All teachers are Austswim qualified.
- We provide a purpose built pool with a special teaching ledge where your baby can play and explore independently.
- We provide an ideal learning environment for babies and children.
- We provide variety and innovation so that parents and children are always challenged and never bored as they learn in an aquatic environment.
- We have a commitment to quality lessons, ongoing parent education and ensuring that both you and your child are satisfied with our program.