



Live Well, Work Well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home and life—brought to you by the insurance professionals at Sullivan Benefits

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WATER COMPETENCY

Swimming is one of the nation's most popular physical activities. Every summer, millions of Americans flock to pools and beaches for fun and relaxation. However, swimming can pose a real danger to untrained individuals.

According to data from a recent American Red Cross poll, only 56 percent of self-described swimmers can perform all five of the basic skills that prevent swimming-related injuries and death. The Red Cross survey found that more than half of all Americans either can't swim or don't have all of the basic swimming skills.

Much worse are the numbers for spotting and assisting swimmers in distress. Ninety-three percent of respondents were unable to identify the correct order of steps for helping a swimmer in danger.

According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about ten people die from unintentional drowning every day. Drowning is the second leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 4, behind birth defects.

Children and adults who survive a close call with drowning can still be permanently affected by the event. Nonfatal water-related injuries can lead to severe brain damage and long-term disabilities.

The CDC report also found that the main factors that contribute to the risk of drowning are the lack of swimming ability, the lack of barriers to prevent unsupervised water access, the lack of close supervision while swimming, location, failure to wear life jackets, alcohol use and seizure disorders.

Critical Water Safety Skills

To ensure the safety of you and your family during water recreation, it's essential for swimmers to possess critical water safety skills. These skills, also known as "water competency," are:

1. Floating or treading water for one minute without using a floatation device

2. Submerging yourself in the water and safely returning to the surface
3. Treading water or floating in a full circle, and then safely exiting the water
4. Exiting a pool or body of water without using a ladder
5. Swimming 25 yards without stopping

The CDC recommends taking formal swimming lessons in order to learn these critical swimming skills, especially for children aged 1 to 4 years.

Spotting Someone in Distress

Water emergencies can happen quickly and silently. Here are some tips to help you spot a person who is at risk for drowning:

- A swimmer in distress may still try to swim but makes little or no forward progress. If not helped, the swimmer will become exhausted and most likely drown.
- A drowning individual may be vertical in the water but unable to move forward or tread water.
- An individual who is struggling in the water may try to press down with his or her arms to his or her side in an instinctive attempt to keep his or her head above the water.
- A passive drowning person is motionless and floating face-down on the bottom or near the surface of the water.

Swimming can be the perfect way to spend a hot summer afternoon—as long as you understand and prepare for water-related hazards beforehand.

