

Why wear a wetsuit ?

With Open Water Swimming becoming increasingly popular, there is a much wider choice of events to attend. Mainly due to safety issues and the number of potential participants, some of these events insist on all swimmers wearing a wetsuit. (There are also events that give swimmers the choice of swimming with or without one, and other events are costume-only – sometimes in incredibly cold temperatures !)The important thing as an Open Water swimmer is to enjoy participating in the sport, and for some swimmers this means wearing a wetsuit some or all of the time.

General tips – (just a few guidelines but much is down to size, shape, budget, personal preference ...)

Essential – make sure you get a wetsuit designed for open water swimming / triathlon (not surfing !)

If possible, hire suits out or try swimming in a suit that you're hoping to purchase. Wetsuits feel different when you swim in them !

Remember that the wetsuit needs to be right for your size and swimming style.

Swimming in a wetsuit is different to swimming without one and is a skill that needs to be developed.

If you're trying the suit out in a pool, don't swim in it for too long as you can quickly overheat (remember pool temperatures are above the maximum temperatures at which wetsuits are permitted for triathlons.) Stop regularly and drink plenty !

Practice in it several times before race day. You need to adapt to the additional buoyancy, weight, and restriction of the suit.

Style and Fit

Full sleeve or Sleeveless ? Full sleeve is warmer and more buoyant. Sleeveless is less restrictive, so arms are less likely to tire. Given the correct fit with good flexibility in the shoulders, full sleeve wetsuits are generally thought to be faster, but everyone's different !

Fit – tighter can be faster, but too tight can lead to tired arms and slower times over a distance. Too much tightness in the chest makes the suit feel restrictive when breathing. On the other hand, if the suit's too big, it will let in more water and slow you down.

Expect the suit to loosen a little once you're swimming in it.

The objective is for it to fit like a second skin – tight without restricting, and no sags, wrinkles or gaps around the neck !

If the wetsuit can be put on very quickly, the chances are that it's too big. Allow plenty of time, and gradually work the legs, sleeves and body into place

Cost

More expensive suits tend to be more flexible, but a good fit is the most important factor. It's worth considering hiring a suit out or buying a fairly cheap suit initially until you've decided whether or not wearing a wetsuit is for you, and to get a feel for which factors are most important to you. For example, some swimmers prefer more buoyancy than others, some are happy to sacrifice buoyancy (and warmth) for added flexibility.

Care of the Suit

After use, rinse with fresh water and leave it inside out. This will prevent you accidentally damaging the neoprene and protect it from sunlight.

Use a small plastic bag on your feet and hands when putting the suit on. This helps you get the wetsuit on easier and again prevent damage.

Use a recommended anti chafe balm (body glide) on the back of the neck to prevent chaffing. Vaseline's petroleum based and can shorten the life of the neoprene.

Local outlets :- Royles ((Wilmslow), The Endurance Store (nr Wigan). Uswim hire Zone3 suits out for only £6 a time, which allows you to try them out for size.