

## Swimming Programs for Infants or Toddlers

Swim classes for children under the age of 3 years (even under age 1) have become popular in some regions of the U.S. Advocates claim a variety of benefits, such as swimming skills, water safety, health, and fun.

Water play is good exercise. However, these classes do not decrease the chance of accidental drowning.

### Why are infant or toddler swim lessons not appropriate?

- If your child is pushed or hurried, he may develop a fear of water. If your child screams or is afraid during any type of water program, discontinue it temporarily.
- If someone is not holding your child and she happens to go underwater, she can inhale enough water in the first 10 seconds to cause symptoms of near drowning.
- Swallowed pool water can be dangerous. If a child swallows too much water, the concentration of salt in the body can be lowered to a dangerous level and may cause seizures. Avoid infant programs that encourage submersion of the head for more than a few seconds.
- Even if your child can be taught how to swim, he cannot learn to save himself. Children are not able to understand the basic elements of water safety before they are 4 years old. Don't let your child's ability to dog-paddle give you a false sense of security. Adult supervision is essential when your child is around water.

### When and how should I teach my child about water?

If you want to acquaint your infant or toddler with water, do so in a wading pool and concentrate on having fun, not learning how to swim. There are many baby/parent swim classes that teach water safety for parents and introduce babies to water by having fun. These are not intended to be swimming lessons.

You can enroll your child in true swimming lessons at the age of 4 or 5 years. If you have already taught your child to enjoy the water, she may learn to swim quickly.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.