



# BRASS MONKEYS CHALLENGE

## Safety Advice

As with any activity there are risks so be aware of those risks and mitigate them if possible. If you have a heart condition, high blood pressure, asthma or are pregnant then seek medical advice before plunging into cold water. Before taking on the Brass Monkeys Challenge please consider the following:

- Follow the same risk assessment and safety procedures that you would do with any open water swim – know your entry and exit points, be aware of tides and currents, look out for sharp objects/rocks etc underfoot, don't swim alone. The safest place to cold water swim is at a supervised and lifeguarded swimming lake – see [outdoorswimmer.com](https://www.outdoorswimmer.com) for their directory of winter swimming venues and in-depth open water safety advice.
- Be aware of cold-water shock – which is immersion in water cooler than around 15°C. This is the body's initial and automatic response to rapid change in skin temperature. It causes, among other things, a sharp intake of breath, an increase in breathing rate and an increase in blood pressure. It typically lasts up to a couple of minutes. For the unwary, cold water shock can be deadly, especially if that sharp intake of breath occurs under water. Enter the water slowly and keep your face clear until your breathing is under control.
- Understand hypothermia which occurs when deep body temperature falls below 35°C (95°F) and can eventually lead to loss of consciousness and heart failure. The amount of time you can swim in cold water without suffering from hypothermia is determined by many factors including weather conditions, body shape, size and experience. Start with short swims to learn what your limits are. The signs of moderate hypothermia include confusion, inebriated-like behaviour and slurred speech. Swimmers suffering from moderate hypothermia may think that they feel warm and want to keep swimming. If you are in any doubt at all about the health and welfare of the swimmer call the emergency services immediately. Severe hypothermia symptoms include blue-grey skin (cyanosis) slow breathing, loss of consciousness and medical help should be called for immediately.
- Be aware of after-drop which is decline in your core body temperature after you have got out of the water. When you swim in cold water the body cleverly tries to protect vital organs by reducing blood flow to the skin and limbs. Thus the core stays warm while the skin, arms and legs cool down. The process is known as peripheral vasoconstriction. Shortly after you exit the water, peripheral vasoconstriction ends. Cold blood from your limbs and skin returns to your core where it mixes with warmer blood thereby causing your deep body temperature to drop, even if you're warmly dressed and move into a warm environment. This is why you often only start shivering 10 to 15 minutes after leaving the water. This is known as the 'honeymoon period' when you should get dried and changed quickly before you start shivering and getting dressed becomes much more difficult.
- It takes time to build experience of cold water. Start with very short swims and build gradually over time. Your body's reaction can vary from day to day, depending on external factors such as sleep, stress, recent food and drink intake etc. Learn to trust your own experiences and feelings. You should always come out of the water feeling like you could have stayed in longer.