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# Swim without fear

**A guide for parents**  
**How to support children take their first steps**  
**towards swimming**



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## **Swimming makes holidays more fun**

Summer and holiday time! Playing in the water, diving, swimming and paddling! Spending time with family on the beach, in the swimming pool, water park, by the lake or river are a delight on a hot day. However, the fun will be more complete if the children know how to swim.

Many children are afraid of water, and if they don't overcome this fear, they will only watch as others have fun in the water. Not only will they miss a lot of fun in the water, but this phobia can also stop them from handling critical situations and lead to accidents.

The booklet "Swim without Fear" is a valuable tool for the holidays. With its help parents can guide their children in overcoming their fear of water. This guidebook can also be used by parents who can't swim.



## Swimming

It's not only a vital and life-saving skill. There are so many benefits of swimming. Learning to swim can open a world of opportunities and is beneficial for your child's whole life. Safety might be parents' top priority, but kids who learn how to swim at early age enjoy many other benefits, including good physical and mental health.

- By swimming, children can grow up and develop harmoniously. Activities in the water are good for the whole body and strengthen the immune system.
- Swimming helps good habit formation. It teaches discipline and organization. It helps children gain confidence, a useful characteristic for success in school, sports and throughout life. It teaches teamwork and creates friendships.



## **The water**

Water covers most of the surface of our planet. Life on Earth originated in water and all living things need it. Life without water is impossible.

Water is also home to millions of species, from tiny creatures, invisible to the eye, to blue whales reaching 30 meters.

On hot summer days, we seek cooling in the water - on the beach, by the pool or by the lakeshore.

Water provides an opportunity for sports activities and having a good time, and not only during the holidays.

There are many places where children can take their first steps in swimming. The sea, a pool, the big tub in the yard of the country house, the lake... The water should be clear and clean, and appropriate for swimming. The most suitable temperature for children under 6 years old is about 28 degrees Celsius.



## **Safety on the beach**

It is highly recommended, before the vacation, to check and be aware of the beach and pool safety rules and regulations, and help the children learn the basics. (In different countries, signs and rules may vary. That's why, it is important to take time and make some research beforehand.)

		
BATHING/SWIMMING ALLOWED!	BATHING/SWIMMING ALLOWED! WITH CAUTION!	BATHING/SWIMMING IS FORBIDDEN!

- Water activities can only take place when the sea is calm and the flag is green.
- When there is a yellow flag, swimming is allowed, but with caution and without any inflatable objects – beach belts, air hammocks and mattresses, boats, etc.
- When there is a red flag, entering the water is absolutely prohibited!

### **Hidden dangers**

The bathing and training place chosen by the parents should be well screened and examined in advance. There should be no holes, pits, stones, dangerous objects such as broken glass, etc.

Diving and jumping into unscreened and not suitable for swimming water is dangerous! Nobody should go into the water far from the shore chasing inflatable objects such as balls, life belts, mattresses, or toys!

## **Before the activities in the water**

Parents could show some pictures of swimming, swimming lessons to their children.

It is recommended to go for a swim no earlier than two hours after a meal.

Teaching activities should last no more than 30 - 45 minutes.

When possible, take a shower with cool or cold water before entering the water to acclimate to the temperature difference. It is also very important to establish hygiene habits in children, such as showering before and after swimming.

Remember that before every swimming lesson the kids should warm up their body with some easy but useful exercises. This way, the little ones will be better prepared for new challenges in the water!



## **Do not pressure your child!**

Before starting teaching, the parent should know that it is necessary to be patient and not pressure the child.

It is absolutely wrong and stressful to throw the little one into the water, even shallow, supposedly with the intention of provoking the survival instinct and making them swim up.

Violent methods can cause a serious psychological trauma. They can develop a fear of water that is very difficult to overcome over time, and it is a major obstacle for a person to learn to swim.



## **Parents, take your time!**

Patience is the key to success! Don't try to show and achieve everything at once and expect results from a weeklong beach or pool vacation. Keep in mind that all children develop at different paces. The time needed for getting used to the water and being able to get calm and relaxed in the water, is different for every child. Parents should not force their little ones into the water if they are cold or not in the mood. Swimming lessons should bring smiles, not unpleasant experiences and emotions.

### **It is easier to swim on your back, but not if you're afraid!**

A child who cannot swim should not be placed on their back in the water. In this position the child feels defenseless. The likelihood of the child being frightened is really big. Swimming on the back is easier, but only when the child learns how to stay afloat and is not afraid of the deep or of water getting in the nose, ears or eyes.

### **The life jacket hampers the swimmer**

Do not let your children get used to a life jacket or other floating accessories. They interfere with their natural position in the water. These aids are safety devices but have no relevance to learning to swim.





## **Explain why the boat doesn't sink**

In order to prepare a child psychologically, it is a good idea to show and introduce the little one in a simple and understandable way to the physical principle of any object or body to stay afloat in the water. Suitable pictures might be used or it could be demonstrated with a toy ship/fish in the sink or bathtub how the boat doesn't sink, because of the air inside.



## **First steps in the bathroom**

Wash the child's face thoroughly with cold water every day in the morning and evening.

Stand next to the bathtub, when the child is in, and let the kid scoop up handfuls of water and pour and bathe first the body and then the head.

### **Let's make up a storm in the bathtub!**

Stand by the washbasin or bathtub, let the child take a deep breath and blow into the handfuls filled with water. While doing so, suggest that the little one tries to produce sound "Vvvv".

Then, again over the washbasin or sitting in the tub, bring the child's face close to the surface of the water and ask them to exhale.

Have the kid make so that he or she is causing ripples with the mouth touching the water. When the child has done this, they have succeeded with the first important exercise.



## **How to blow bubbles at home**

Let the child immerse the face in the water of the washbasin or bathtub, and then gradually try to look under the water with the eyes wide open.

When the child has dipped the head and submerged face many times, let the kid try to take a deep breath and hold it for a few seconds under the water, and exhale. If bubbles appear in the water, then the child is doing well.

Next, proceed with making more bubbles, exhaling through the nose. It is advisable to repeat it about 10 times.

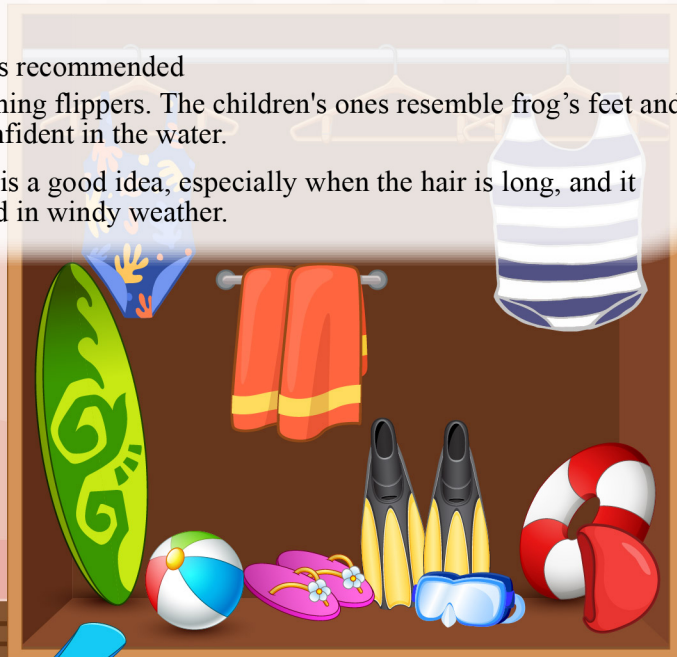


## Swimming equipment

What do we need for the swimming practice?

- Swimwear - a swimsuit or trunks (it is important that the child feels comfortable and at ease)
- Swim goggles
- Flip flops
- A towel
- A swimming cap is recommended
- If possible, swimming flippers. The children's ones resemble frog's feet and make kids more confident in the water.

The swimming cap is a good idea, especially when the hair is long, and it protects against cold in windy weather.



## **STEPS TOWARDS SWIMMING**

### **How to step on bottom**

Water is an unnatural environment for people. A person does not have a support in it except the bottom, and beginner swimmers' movements are unsteady and sometimes erratic. A feeling of fear can arise.

Some of the most important tasks for the child is to gain confidence in the water, to know how to step on the bottom.

Useful exercises for getting used to the bottom is chasing each other in shallow waters, dipping, splashing, playing with a ball, etc.



## **Learning how to breathe**

We recall what the child did over the washbasin or in the bathtub. The exhaling underwater, the ripples and bubbles.

It's time for gaining more confidence. The child can hold the parent's hands, and repeat the exercises from the washbasin or bathtub. Start with up to 10 repetitions. Later on, you can do two times of 10.



## **Exercise figures**

Some exercises on buoyancy (the lifting power of water) are an important step towards overcoming the fear of water, the deep, and the unknown. There are various types of figures performed by taking deep breaths and holding the air so that the body remains at rest on the surface of the water.

### **"Sponge"**

It is important to take a deep breath first. The body is curled into a ball, the chin is brought to the chest, and the hands cover the legs below the knees. This way, the body gradually floats to the surface until the child's back is shown. As the air is released/exhaled, the body sinks (goes down a little).

### **"Starfish"**

This is the second exercise. After taking a breath slowly, the child lies down on the chest with the arms next to the body, while the parent is supporting the kid. When the body is in a stable position, after a few tries, the child slowly spreads the legs first, then the arms to a starfish-like figure. When performed correctly the body floats completely on the surface of the water.



### **It is fun and not scary anymore**

It is no longer scary for the child to be in the water. Let the child try jumping up together with the parent somewhere no deeper than half a meter and with safe conditions. Before this, the child should inhale and exhale several times to calm down. Then, taking a deep breath and holding hands the child and parent start jumping from the bottom. First, holding both hands and then only one. Almost the same is the way to teach the child jump (dive) into the water from the edge of a shallow pool.

Try the “Dolphin” jump. The child squats in the shallow part of the water body and jumps up and forward trying to make a slight arc. It would be good to try and reach the parent with hands after the jump, the parent being in front of the child.

It's time for toys to be included in the fight against the fear of water. For this, you need a still-water surface and good visibility. Drop some favorite toys on the bottom and ask your child to get them back. It's a good idea if, while groping for them, the child exhales underwater and keeps the eyes wide open. Supervise the little one all the time.





## **Mom, Dad and Me**

It's time for mom, dad, older sister or brother to get even more involved in the kid's swimming activities.

### Tugged by a parent

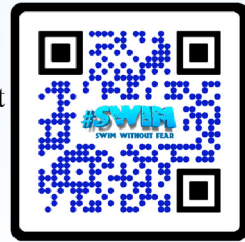
Holding the hands pull the child on the surface of the water. It is better if the child exhales in the water.

### Diving

Stand in a wide-legged stance at a depth that is just above the child's waist. The goal is for the kid to dive trying to squeeze under this peculiar "tunnel" several times without touching the parent's legs.

These exercises will be enough for the first swimming lessons.

You can also enjoy swimming to the sounds of the #SWIM! song. Scan the code and immerse yourself in swimming emotion



## **Swimming styles**

There are four swimming styles. They are used not only in competitions, but also to make the swimming lessons more fun and of better quality.

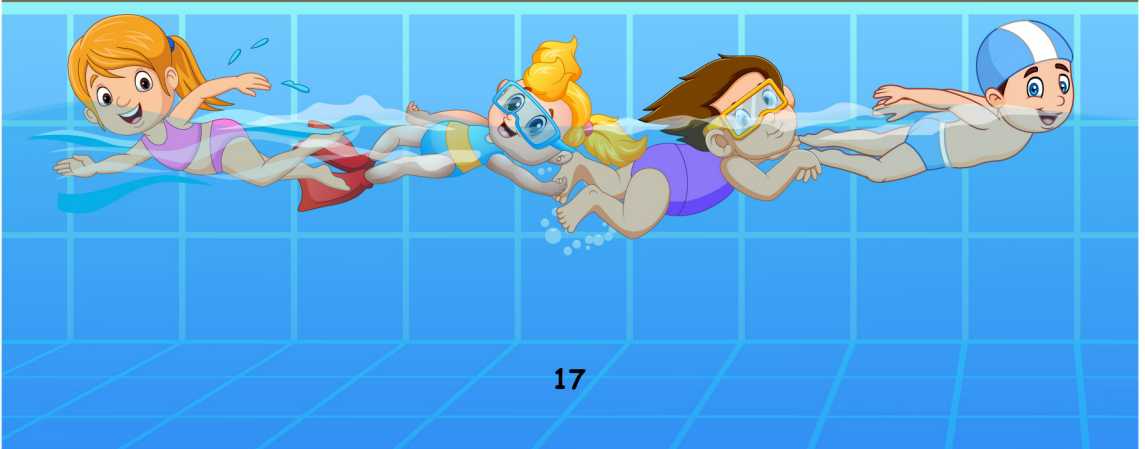
**Crawl** is the basic and fastest style.

**Backstroke** is similar to the crawl, but the body lies on its back in the water, and this allows better breathing.

**Breaststroke** is the most favored style because you swim with the least effort, and your head stays longer above the water making it easier to breathe.

**Butterfly (or dolphin)** because it resembles the marine mammal. This style is taught last because it is the most difficult to learn and tiring to swim.

In the short time during the holiday, the best thing is to start with learning only the most important elements of two of the styles, the crawl and the backstroke.



### **Crawl legs movement (dryland practice)**

In order for the body to keep in horizontal position on the water surface and float, in addition to filling the chest with air, we must also be able to kick properly with the legs. Let's start with learning the leg crawl exercises "on dry land".

The workout is held on the beach or by the pool. The child lies on the chest on a pile of sand, an inflatable cushion, a gymnastic or similar bench. The legs and feet should be extended. They move up and down past each other like a pair of opening and closing scissors. Between 15 and 30 movements should be done.



### **Legs movement for backstroke (dryland practice)**

If the day is not very sunny and hot, it will be good to take a little more time for exercise on land.

The leg movements for backstroke on dry land are very similar to those of crawl. The difference is that the movement is performed upwards with the feet extended and the child lying on the back.

The child sits on the edge of the pool with arms behind supporting the body or lies on a pile of sand. The kid extends the feet and performs a scissor-like up and down movement of the legs.



## **Crawl leg movement with fixed and movable support in the water**

It should be practiced in slightly deeper water - up to 1.2 meters. The child lies on the chest and holds on to a fixed support. This support can also be the parent's hands (the kid's arms should be extended, preferably along the surface of the water). The learner begins to move the legs up and down, consistently and evenly. It is important that the legs are not tight, but move freely. The leg kicks should be smooth and relaxed, with knees not bent (or just slightly bending). The feet and toes should be extended straight.

Then the child tries the same exercise but with a moveable support. It can be mom or dad holding and supporting the little one while moving forward. A variation is pulling with a floating pool noodle or a help pole. Initially, the exercise is done with random breathing, with the head held so that the mouth is above the still water.

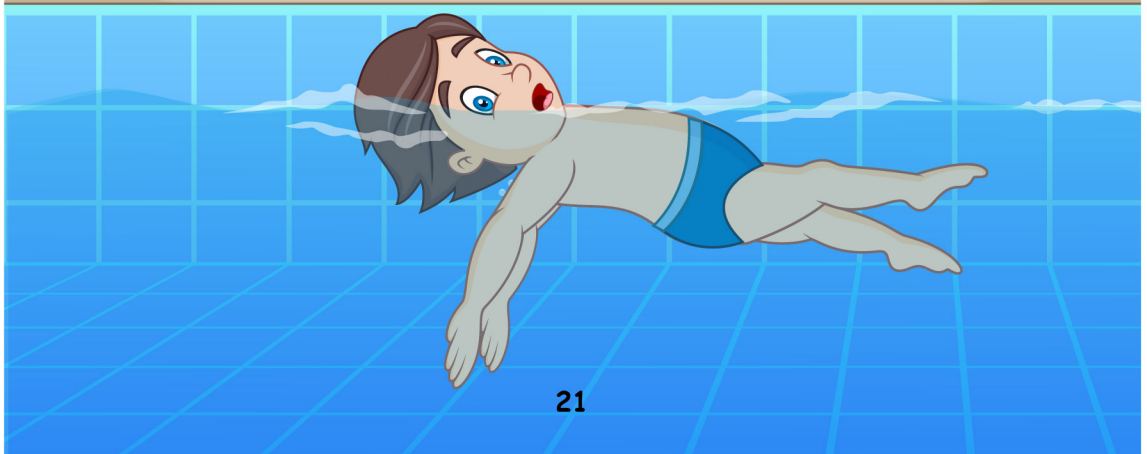


## **Backstroke leg kicks with fixed and movable support**

Next are exercises for the backstroke leg movement. They are done after the crawl legs exercises have been mastered. They can be done in shallow waters with hands resting on the bottom. The movements are performed with feet and toes extended. The difference between the crawl and backstroke leg movement is that this time the leg is slightly bending in the upward movement, and the downward movement is done with the leg straight.

It is important that the child does not expose the knees and toes above the surface of the water.

The exercises for backstroke kicks are easier and quicker to learn because you are breathing above the water.



## **The swimming kickboard, a helper of little ones and of champions**

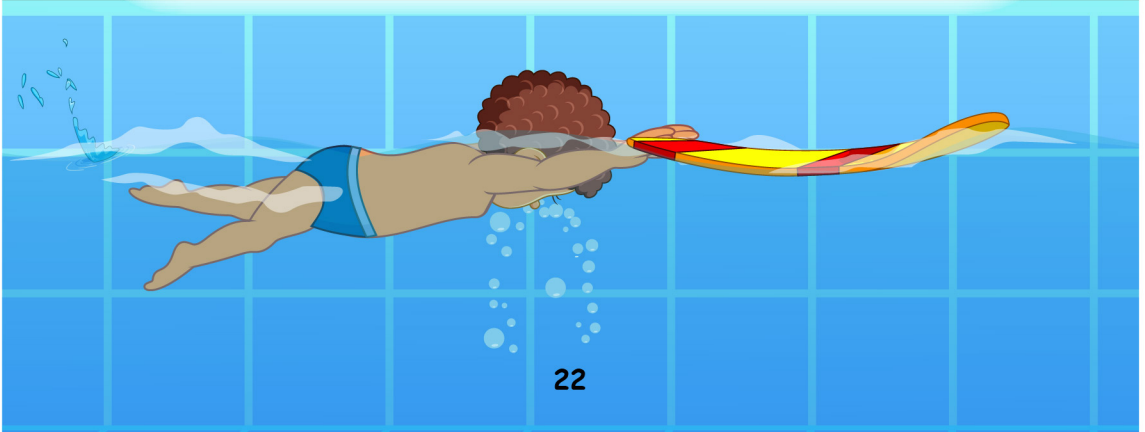
After gaining confidence in kicking with a stationary and moving support, it's time to try the crawl leg movement with a swim kickboard. This aid is great for learning how to swim and is an essential assistant to every swimmer.

A small inflatable ball or cushion is not recommended because it creates a sense of security but can easily slip away and get out of reach. But a swim noodle or a suitable floating toy can also do a good job.

First, the swimming practice with a kickboard should be about 10 meters. The head is above the water. Then, the child tries again, but the face is submerged in the water, water covering the ears. After 5-6 kicks the child lifts the chin up to take a breath.

Be sure the ankles are stretched out and the knees are not too bent. It is also important that when taking a breath, the kicking does not stop.

Finally, the child can try to do a "dart". In this exercise, the kid jumps forward or pushes off something with feet and tries to reach as far forward as possible with the body stretched out and the arms tucked in and forward, with the head between them.



### **Arm circles forward (dryland practice)**

The child stands in a slightly staggered posture to feel stable. Raising both arms high with palms forward the kid does circles with the left arm. First 15, then 30 circles.

Then the circles are done with the right arm starting with 15, then 30 repetitions.

Finally, circles are performed with both arms forward. First, simultaneously, then alternately.





### **Arm circles backwards (dryland practice)**

Again, in a steady position, the child raises the arms up with the palms facing outwards and does backward circles with the arms. Begin with 15 circles, then 30. First with one and after that with the other arm.

Finally, alternate left and right arms.

The exercise is done properly if the arm moves near the ear when going up, and with a palm close to the thigh when the arm is in a low position.



## **Arm movement for crawl (dryland and water practice)**

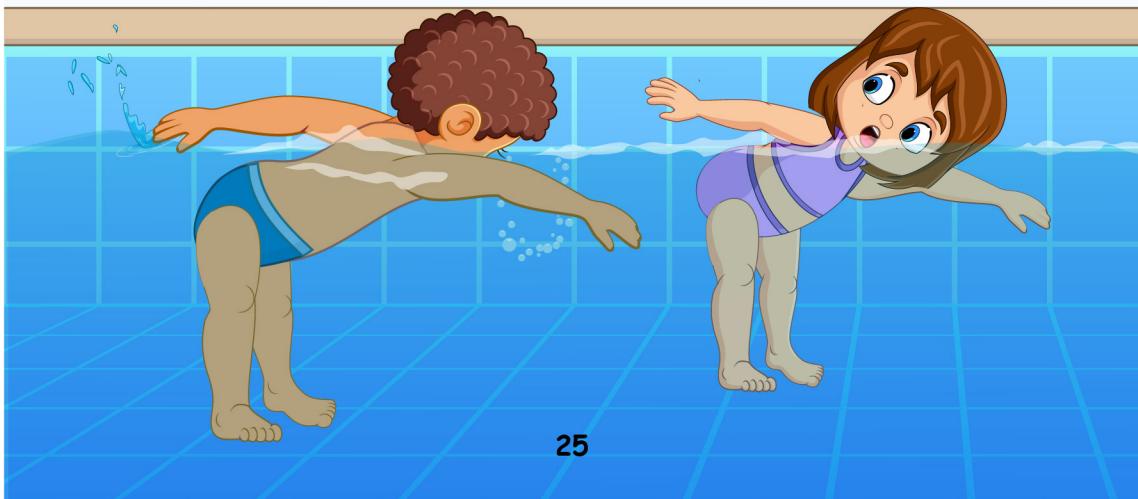
The child is in a steady position with the feet a little apart. The upper part of the body is bent forward with the arms raised up and palms facing downwards. The child begins to trace a circle with one hand.

Moving the outstretched arm, the hand should go beside the thigh. Then, while continuing the circle, the palm should be turned outwards and then the arm is brought up again.

At first, the exercise is done with each arm separately.

If done well, a successive arm movement is also attempted.

The same exercise is performed in water up to the waist with an adult observing and supervising.



## **Arm and hand movement for backstroke (dryland practice)**

The child is standing in a slightly straddled posture with arms raised up high and palms facing outwards.

The slightly bent in the elbow arm rotates backwards and down to the thigh and continues the back-forward circle without interruption.

Initially, the exercise is performed with each hand separately, and finally with both hands alternately.



## **Vacation is over, time to train**

Vacation is over! The children's first steps into “deeper water” and swimming are behind.

- If the children now jump and dive into the water without fear...
- If they find toys, flippers, seashells, objects underwater and calmly dive in and take them out...
- If they can do “sponge”, “starfish”, “dart” and other drills in the water...
- If they can already do all this, the children have learned the first steps towards swimming. They are now ready for their first swimming training sessions; with which they will fully discover the beauty of this wonderful sport.

And they are not afraid of water anymore!



## The authors

**Georges Stankovic** is one of the leading swimming specialists and coaches in Bulgaria. He graduated from the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski". He has trained thousands of children, and two of them are Olympic Games participants. A successful swimming athlete and champion himself, Stankovic also has great experience as a swimming referee, physical education teacher and lifeguard. He has been a speaker at international coaching seminars and a published author in print and electronic publications. Head coach at the swimming club "Sprint" and sports director at the Association of Bulgarian Swimmers.

**Vasilen Dimitrov** is a former national swimming athlete, multiple champion and coach with many years of experience. He graduated from the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski". A sports journalist with 30 years of experience, Dimitrov is the editor-in-chief of Swimming & Water Polo magazine and the website BGswim.com. He has written thousands of publications about swimming sports for more than 20 media outlets. Co-author and editor of 5 books. Secretary General of the Association of Bulgarian Swimmers, Activist in conducting coaching seminars and sports events.

## **The editors**

**Nikolay Krastev.** Champion in swimming for juniors, students and masters, and competitor in water polo. Graduated Bulgarian philology at Sofia University. A reputable journalist who has been covering 6 Olympic Games and many World Championships in the most prestigious sports. Publisher of "Sprint" and "Swimming & Water Polo" magazines, as well as BGswim.com. Author, editor or publisher of more than 20 books on sports topics. The only Bulgarian winner of the MOC Sports and Media Award for sports journalism. President of the Bulgarian Swimmers Association.

**Vesela Shishkova.** English and Russian language teacher with a second specialty in Psychology. She is a co-author of "Going Places" - a series of English language textbooks for Bulgarian schools (5–8 grades), and a reviewer of teaching materials for the Bulgarian Ministry of Education.

Swimming becomes an inseparable part of her life after she overcomes strong hydrophobia at the age of five with the help of a professional swimming instructor. Later on she starts competing and wins many swimming awards - from "The Youngest Swimmer" prize (1970) to medals in state students and masters' competitions. She is an active member of the Association of Bulgarian Swimmers.

#SWIM! - Swim Without Fear! is an initiative co-funded by the Erasmus+ program that aims to analyze the relationship between sport and overcoming hydrophobia at an early age in an innovative and different way. The idea to produce this good practical guide was born out of this project, which will be useful for both parents and organizations in the field of swimming. A survey of parents and swimming coaches was conducted for the #SWIM! - Swim Without Fear! project.

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## **AR Swim #SWIM**

The #SWIM project team brings you an augmented reality experience for kids that is free and can be installed on mobile devices running both operating systems. The aim of the AR app #SWIM is to enable the enjoyment of water experiences and through this positive adventure - to reduce the fear of water in early age development. Enjoy #SWIM - swimming without fear with AR.

Install the Augmented Reality app #SWIM - Swim Without Fear. Run the experience by following the steps below:

1. Install the app on your device (QR code below);
2. Open the #SWIM app and point your phone at the image in this news story;
3. Enjoy the experience and let's swim together without fear.





**SCAN  
me!** 



**Note:** We recommend that you print the image as otherwise you will need two devices - one with the application running and one to scan (Tip: you can also print the image black/white).  
Discover many more interesting tools, tips and useful information about swimming at an early age at [www.myswim.org](http://www.myswim.org)



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