



4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2266
<https://safety.army.mil>

The Fun Killer

**Strategic Communication Directorate
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center
Fort Rucker, Ala.**

Hanging out at the pool or beach on hot summer days is a great way to beat the heat, but water-related activities come with certain risks. Don't let an accident kill your fun this summer — know your limitations and mitigate the hazards to ensure your day in the sun and surf doesn't end in tragedy.

Strong swimming skills are essential if you plan to be on or near the water. If you're not already a swimmer, check with your local Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation directorate to schedule lessons. Organizations off post including the Red Cross and YMCA also regularly schedule classes for both novice and experienced swimmers.

We talk a lot about battle buddies in the Army, and spending a day on the water is no time to go solo. Always swim with a buddy; even experienced swimmers can get hurt or become tired and be unable to exit the water without help. A swim buddy can provide valuable assistance or call for help if an emergency happens.

Open bodies of water like rivers, lakes and the ocean have a number of hazards that aren't found in regular swimming pools, primarily currents and a propensity for rapidly changing conditions. Therefore, it's ideal to swim only in areas supervised by lifeguards, who are thoroughly trained in rescue techniques. But should you be caught in a current without a lifeguard nearby, don't panic or fight against the water. Swim parallel to shore until you leave the current and gradually make your way back to the sand. If the current is too powerful, float along with it until it slows down to conserve your energy. Exhaustion can set in very quickly when trying to swim out of a current.

Above all, never mix alcohol and swimming. Among other side effects, alcohol weakens your judgment, balance and coordination; impairs your swimming and diving skills; and makes it harder for the body to stay warm. Ensure your buddies stay sober on the water as well — a drunk friend will be of no assistance should you need help and might be inclined to take unnecessary risks that lead to an accident.

To learn more swimming safety, visit the U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center's interactive Water Safety website at <https://safety.army.mil/safetycity/pages/water/watersafety.aspx>.

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