

Water Water Everywhere

By Suze Hargraves

I remember dad's green Pontiac pulling into the yard. Every kid in the neighborhood was in our pool. Upon seeing the Pontiac we would all scamper out of the pool. We would hoot and cheer knowing what was coming. It had been a long, hot day. In flash dad's shoes and wallet were tossed into the air and in a single leap, work clothes and all, dad was in the pool with a million kids giggling and cheering. (It wasn't until years later that we learned that he'd been sure to cool off in the car before diving into the cold pool water. Cold water on a heated body can be a dangerous shock to the system!) In our home, being in the water was a source of joy, exercise and fond memories.

Playing and exercising in the water is a great way to stay or get in shape. Enjoying water however, whether it's a pool, lake, pond or the ocean, requires some caution and some common sense. The Center for Disease Controls recommends six things to prevent drowning:

SUPERVISION. Designate a responsible adult to watch young children while in the bath and all children swimming or playing in or around water. Supervisors of preschool children should provide "touch supervision", be close enough to reach the child at all times. Adults should not be involved in any other distracting activity (such as reading, playing cards, talking on the phone, or mowing the lawn) while supervising children.

BUDDY SYSTEM. Always swim with a buddy. Select swimming sites that have lifeguards whenever possible.

AVOID ALCOHOL. Avoid drinking alcohol before or during swimming, boating, or water skiing. Do not drink alcohol while supervising children.

LEARN TO SWIM. Formal swimming lessons can protect young children from drowning. However, constant, careful supervision and barriers such as pool fencing are necessary even when children have completed swimming classes.

LEARN CARDIOPULMONARY RESUSCITATION (CPR). In the time it might take for paramedics to arrive, your CPR skills could make a difference in someone's life. CPR performed by bystanders has been shown to improve outcomes in drowning victims.

DO NOT USE AIR-FILLED OR FOAM TOYS. Do not use air-filled or foam toys, such as "water wings", "noodles", or inner-tubes, in place of life jackets (personal flotation devices). These toys are not designed to keep swimmers safe.

The thing I see most consistently at our regional lakes is a lack of attentive supervision in the absence of an assigned life guard. When the sign says, "No Lifeguard on Duty" that means someone in your party has to act as a lifeguard. How would you react if a professional lifeguard was texting, reading a book or sunning with eyes closed when they were supposed to be watching your kids? Hold yourself to those same standards. Take shifts during the day so a single person doesn't get bored with lifeguard duty while the others are off having fun. Bored people are not attentive people and they are certainly not good supervisors.

If you think drowning isn't something that could happen to you or someone you love think again. In 2007 there were an average of 10 deaths a day in the United States due to drowning. The CDC lists lack of barriers and supervision, lack of life jacket use in recreational boating, alcohol use and seizure disorders as the five major risk factors for drowning. Assign a "water safety officer" in your home or group. This person should go to www2.redcross.org/services/hss/tips/healthtips/safetywater.html and study the materials there. Also one or more people in your group should be certified in Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR). Call your local Red Cross Chapter for more information on safety and CPR certification.

Staying safe this summer means playing it smart. By getting in the water and moving, you can tone up your body, build stamina, increase your metabolism and more. By playing it safe you'll make sure there are many more happy memories to come.

Suze is a staff member of White Mountain Community Health Center and a freelance writer. Visit www.whitemountainhealth.org for more information or find us on Facebook.