

## Surfing

Surfing was first observed in Tahiti by Europeans in 1767 although when surfing was first carried out is unknown. In 1922, our own Agatha Christie learnt to stand on a surfboard in Hawaii, enjoying it so much she stayed for 3 months (much longer than originally intended)!



Image courtesy of: [museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk](http://museumofbritishsurfing.org.uk)

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### *MINIMISING THE INJURY INCIDENCE*

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Surfing is a very dynamic and reactive sport. The complexities associated with surfing come down to mobility, agility, balance and muscular endurance. There is also a 'significant other': cognitive ability...the ability for the brain to translate what is happening to the body at one particular time and make adjustments, based on previous experience. This is why some many novices, irrespective of age readily fall off (me included!) as the memory banks have not built up enough data to select a response that will lead to the intended outcome *i.e.* not falling off the board but continuing to ride the wave!

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### *EFFICIENT MOVEMENT IS KEY*

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Muscular endurance (the ability to repeatedly contract the same muscle without fatigue) is perhaps the greatest demand on the body. Paddling out (front crawl arms) against the sea and potentially an onshore wind is hard enough but having to do this with a wider action than normal (due to the surfboard) creates more work for the shoulder muscles.

Swimming is a dynamic (moving) activity that can help train the arm action with greater resistance by holding a float between the thighs, meaning that all propulsion will be generated from the shoulders and arms. In a swimming pool you don't need to contend with the current, white water (breaking waves), strength of the wind or other surfers so by training this way the arms will develop to cope more easily with the open water environment. This movement can also be replicated in a gym by lying prone on a bench and tying resistance bands from your wrists to fixed uprights (of another machine) or tied to heavy dumb bells. As the anchor points for these bands are in front of you, there will be increased resistance as you pull your arm back (as if completing a front crawl stroke in the water) which will be released as the arm is raised at the end of the stroke and begins to reach forward again. Examples of other exercises can be found [here](#).



Other exercises that can translate to surfing are press-ups, which can progress to 'pop-ups' (a press up that hops the feet under the body at the highest point in the press-up so the person can stand...without either knee touching the ground [surfboard]).

Core stability from practising [plank exercises](#), [back hyper-extensions](#), [supermans](#), [abdominal work](#) and [clams](#) will all help the 3-D movements that need to be overcome in the process of standing on the board and then actually maintaining the appropriate position to surf.

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### SUCCESS WITH SURFING

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If you can get to your feet on the board probably the most important 2 components of fitness are agility and mobility.

Agility is being able to co-ordinate different parts of the body, at speed and still complete the task. As I alluded to earlier, your body needs to learn what to do in different situations. The problem is, when you come across a new situation, there is no experience to rely on in order to successfully navigate that specific moment- this builds up over time. There is also not time to consciously think about what is happening, why, what adjustments with which body parts/muscles needs to happen at with how much force...movements become more like reflex reactions and this comes from actually trying to surf, for real. Whilst many people learn through 'trial and error' attending a surf school for lessons to help hone basic and correct technique will alleviate having to 'unlearn' muscle movement patterns that prevent progress in the future, should your goal be to develop towards an expert surfer.

Due to the ever changing centre of mass on the board, there will be constant changes and if a surfer does not have a wide range of motion (especially in shoulders, thoracic and lower back, hips and knees) the extent to which a change can be made will be limited and in turn will limit the progress that can be made. Reaction time and balance are also important ingredients in surfing. The good news is that improve balance is to keep practising!



If you are looking for a conditioning programme for surfing you can look [here](#) for some ideas.

Remember that any training needs to be at a level you can manage. **Don't take up new exercises that you are unfamiliar with, especially if they involve external weights, without consulting a fitness instructor or similar.**