



# 6 Common Questions About Women's Health and Scuba Diving

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Though no precise statistics exist, roughly 1/3 of scuba divers are women — and this number is growing. It goes without saying that all divers should maintain a healthy lifestyle and physical fitness, maintain their health, follow their doctor's recommendations, and dive within the limits of their training and experience. However, there are physiological differences in women that can affect their diving experience. Here are answers to six common questions about women's health and scuba diving.

## 1. Women Can Be More Susceptible to Cold

Body composition (fat content, muscle mass) and size affect how the body reacts to temperature changes. Hormonal and biological differences can cause women to feel cold more easily than men.

In 2016, [The Daily Mail](#) reported on a study that explored why some women feel colder than a man in the same environment. The research found: as temperature decreases, a woman's body cuts blood flow to her extremities (vasoconstriction) faster than the male body. The female body also concentrates body heat in her core.

## 2. Scuba Diving and Pregnancy

Understandably, research data on pregnant women is limited. A post-pregnancy survey of concluded that the women divers who didn't dive during their pregnancies reported no birth defects, while there was a 5.5 percent incidence rate among those who did. While this rate is within the normal range for the national population, the bottom line is that pregnant women and those who are trying to become pregnant should refrain from diving. For more insight, read [The Risks of Diving While Pregnant](#).

## 3. Scuba Diving and Breastfeeding

Scuba diving is considered a safe activity for mothers who are breastfeeding. Though nitrogen accumulates in body tissues during a dive, there is no risk of an infant absorbing this inert gas. Breastfeeding mothers who dive should take extra care to stay hydrated and avoid diving if her breasts are inflamed or infected.

## 4. Scuba Diving After Childbirth

How soon a woman can resume diving after giving birth varies depending on the type of delivery and possible complications. The recommendations below are general guidelines, always consult your doctor.

- Vaginal Delivery: Avoid diving for at least three to four weeks (21 days minimum). This timeframe allows the cervix to close and reduces the risk of infection in the genital tract.
- Cesarean delivery (C-section): Wait at least eight weeks after an uncomplicated Cesarean to ensure wound healing and give the body time to regain stamina.
- Twins, Pre-Term Labor or Other Complications: If the mother has been put on bed rest, wait 12 weeks for the body to regain muscle mass and aerobic capacity. Following a miscarriage, a woman may return to diving upon physician approval for unrestricted activity.

## 5. Scuba Diving After Breast Cancer

Many breast cancer survivors enjoy scuba diving after physical recovery. A 2005 survey of breast cancer survivors conducted by Divers Alert Network® (DAN) found *none* were prohibited from diving by their doctors. The most common recommendation from physicians: wait for incision to heal and for physical strength to return.

- Twelve percent of the divers surveyed reported diving helped reduce their lymphedema, however, one diver mentioned lifting heavy dive gear made lymphedema worse.
- One survey respondent said, "Beware of chemobrain.\* Don't dive with problems in decision-making, memory, or following sequential directions."

In rare cases, chemotherapy drugs damage the body too severely to permit scuba diving, but this is not typical. Always consult a physician before resuming any physical activity.

\* *Chemobrain: loss of focus, mental confusion, loss of memory or decreased thinking clearly that some patients feel after chemotherapy*

## 6. Women and Decompression Sickness (DCS)

An analysis of DCS claims among DAN Members from 2000 to 2007 found the claims rate was lower for women than men by about 60 DCS cases per 100,000 members. Additionally, diving-related deaths are lower for younger female divers, but similar for male and female divers at an older age. DAN's *Annual Diving Report* found 81 percent of fatality victims were men – compared to a total diving population that is 65-78 percent male.

DAN supports women in diving and encourages women to stay healthy so they may continue diving for many years. For more information, read [Women's Health and Diving](#).

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