

Getting Back in the Water

In 2013, I rode my bicycle on a 7,000 km journey across Canada, fulfilling a lifelong dream. It was one of the most extraordinary expeditions I had ever undertaken, but it meant that I would be away from diving for longer than ever before. With staging and prep, I was out of the water for four months, a period that generally represented a hundred dives or more. After riding 100 km per day, I was in top fitness, but not for diving. I was rusty and out of touch.

March 2020 similarly thrust most of us into a pause from diving. With COVID isolations and travel restrictions, some could continue their diving activities, but most, not. Whether it was because of public health restrictions, strained financial resources, or family care responsibilities, diving took a backseat. When we first locked down, nobody would have imagined that the global pandemic would persist for so long, exacting an almost inconceivable loss.

Today, some jurisdictions are cautiously re-emerging from public health restrictions, just as other regions are locked up more tightly than ever before. That means that we are all on individual journeys to recover from an erosion of our skills. Baseline fitness levels may have changed during isolation. Some will also face the uncertainty of when and if they can dive after being infected by COVID-19. Even a minor case of COVID-19 can result in persistent, pulmonary, cardiac, or cognitive issues. Residual symptoms may expose divers to significantly higher risks of barotrauma.

As we look to the future, we can prepare for a safe return to diving.



Training

Whether you are locked down or emerging from your cocoon, exercise your mind. Dig out your old manuals or go online to refresh your skills.

Equipment

Your gear may have languished, unused. Even idle equipment needs service, so support your local dive shop and bring your gear back up to snuff. Your rebreather will likely need new oxygen sensors (once a year, used or not), but it may be time for a professional service too.

General Fitness

Many of us have developed a few new COVID curves from binging on Netflix and eating for comfort. Please don't beat yourself up over it. Stress eating is natural! Make a pact to exercise daily, even if you are housebound from public health restrictions.

Fitness for Diving

Physical fitness is one thing, but diving fitness is something completely different. Whether you are carrying heavy tanks or making a long swim for a shore dive, recognize that you need to get back in good diving form. Diving fitness requires strength training, stamina, and flexibility.

Currency

Your diving skills may have suffered from attrition. Consider jumping in the swimming pool with a friend. Practice all your traditional skills and drills until they feel natural again. Make sure you use a checklist to prepare your open circuit gear or rebreather. Make a list of diving skills, then practice them one by one. Once you feel squared away, ask your buddy to present you with some unexpected drills using an underwater notebook and pencil.



Public Health Advisories

Follow the guidance of local health authorities. If they want you to stay home to reduce the chance of landing in an overfilled hospital, then remember, there will always be another day to dive. Just think about how you would feel if you or a loved one could not get emergency medical care because a facility was either overfilled or understaffed. The bed you take may be required by your friends and family one day.

Read the current advice from the [Divers Alert Network](#) and [DAN Europe](#) that details protocols for prevention or a safe return to diving after COVID-19 exposure. This guidance is constantly updated as new research is available, so be sure you are abreast of recent facts.

Risk Assessment

If you choose to dive during the pandemic, reduce risk as much as possible. Dive local. Remain socially distant and maintain vigilant mask usage. Ask yourself if there is a safer way to enjoy your sport. Think about shore diving and limiting your interactions to a single diving partner or small group.

Travel Plans

Many dive retailers and tourism operations are suffering due to a lack of business. We're all eager to get back to traveling, but consider the ramifications of getting ill abroad. Repatriation might be difficult or delayed. Travel may require multiple, costly tests or long quarantine periods. If you choose to travel, make a plan for the worst possible scenario. Consider medical service availability, emergency evacuation plans, failure of an airline or tour company, and how you can get tested or treated.

No matter where divers live and dive, the principles of getting back into water safely are the same around the world. Hear from Divesoft's Jakub Slama who shares his tips and experiences, which echo my sentiments, in this video.

In March 2020, we never expected this situation to go on for as long as it has. Today, we recognize that we may live in the shadow of COVID for years or longer. In my location, our current infection rate is the highest it has ever been, but there is still cause for hope. I received my first vaccine shot this week, making it far less likely that I will contract a debilitating case of COVID. But I will remember that the journey is not over. If you see me at a dive site with friends, I'll be skipping the dinner gathering and keeping my mask on.

Before leaving make sure your DAN membership is still active. If it isn't, join DAN or renew your membership at www.daneurope.org.

Your DAN membership ensures the services of the biggest international network for assisting divers anywhere, during any emergency.

About the author

[Jill](#) is an underwater explorer, writer, photographer, speaker, and filmmaker. A pioneer of technical rebreather diving, she has led expeditions into icebergs in Antarctica, volcanic lava tubes and submerged caves around the world. Jill is the first Explorer-in-Residence of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Her book, INTO THE PLANET, has been lauded by the Wall Street Journal, Oprah Magazine, and the New York Times. Jill is a Fellow of the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame, Underwater Academy of Arts and Sciences, Women Divers Hall of Fame, National Speleological Society, and the Explorers Club which awarded her with the William Beebe Award.

