

Katie Johnson: Good morning and welcome to Apple A Day Lake Region Healthcare Health and Wellness segment. I'm here with Tom Uvaas. He is a well known figure in Fergus Falls in particularly around the water. Good morning, Tom.

Tom Uvaas: Good morning, Katie.

Katie Johnson: Well it's the Fourth of July. So first of all happy and safe Fourth of July to all of our listeners and I have a hunch a lot of people are going to be out on the water today.

Tom Uvaas: I sure hope so. It's a beautiful day.

Katie Johnson: And when we think about the Fourth of July summer in Minnesota, we can't not talk about lakes. And I wanted to use today's program as a time to talk about being safe when we are on and near and in the water. Whether that's in the lake or in the pool or other sources of water. You work with a lot of adults and kids in teaching them swimming basics, swim safety. Tell me what are some of the cardinal rules when it comes to water safety?

Tom Uvaas: Probably, number one is to know your limits. And that's really true. Regardless, if you're the most experienced swimmer out there or somebody that has a real fear of the water. Just make sure you understand what you can do in the water and what's good for you. So it means just wading in the water and just enjoying the water at that level, that's perfectly fine. If it means swimming across a lake with a boat next to you, that's perfectly fine too. Just want to know your limits and make sure you're safe.

Katie Johnson: And knowing your kids limits even ... key to knowing how closely do you need to watch your kids? Or when is it OK for them to be in water over their head?

Tom Uvaas: I think number one is is that they have to be very skillful to be over their head, a little bit older. A younger child you have to really watch carefully in shallow water. It can be just as dangerous as a deep water. Parents, you can visualize your children and see right away if they're fearful or not. I mean you have that sense. But the key thing is, when they're in the water watch them carefully because anything can happen. If they lose their balance and all of a sudden they can't upright themselves again. It doesn't take a whole lot of time to really hurt yourself in the water.

Katie Johnson: That's so true. Things happen really quickly, especially with young children. Keeping your eyes on them at all time is important. Another rule I know that we hear a lot is use the buddy system.

Tom Uvaas: Absolutely. That's really important. So again, if you're out on the water make sure that you have somebody right next to you, so that if something would happen, they can help you right away. You should never swim alone. That's a cardinal rule. You've heard that forever. And that's really true. You want to always have somebody there, so that if something would happen you have a safety net.

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Katie Johnson: Right. Even if you are a very accomplished swimmer, things can happen that are outside of your control. And having someone else there is important. What about that concept that learning to float or having some kind of mechanism to fall back on should you get too tired or fatigued or something unexpected happens?

Tom Uvaas: Well, you know floating ... There's a survival floating, which is pretty basic. You just would float with your face in the water for a moment and then you kind of roll on your back ... and even a lot of people cannot float on their back. That's really common. But you need to get just on your back just long enough to get a nice little bite of airway caught then roll back. That's helpful. But the number one thing, of course, is if you're in an area that's really deep and you're kind of by yourself, you want to use a personal flotation device or a life preserver or something like that. It makes no difference. I mean, if you're fishing and there's a little bit of chop out there, I'd, definitely, have a life preserver on. Because you just never know if you're going to go over and you don't know how you're going to handle the stress.

Katie Johnson: That's such good advice. I am not afraid to put on my PFD.

Tom Uvaas: I'm not. Every time I go ... I can swim quite well ... But when I go boating this weekend, same thing, I'll put one on automatically and because I just never know.

Katie Johnson: Right, right. Now you, as we mentioned, are a swim coach, a swim instructor. Tell us about the importance of getting that professional swim instruction.

Tom Uvaas: Well, there's a lot of great programs out there. There's the YMCA and all over the place and, of course, we do Foss here but number one I think is important that you have some instructions of some sort. The key thing to swimming, of course, is that you have to be in the water. And so once they take lessons, as a parent what I would do is, I'd reinforce those lessons by taking them out to Pebble or taking them out to some lake or some pool and let them practice at it. Because it's like everything you can learn to read a book but if you don't read a book then you never really can. So it's quite important that you get in the water and just practice how to float and how to propel yourself through the water, how to take a breath once in a while. It's an individual thing but it just takes time.

Katie Johnson: And practice is key. What about the age? At what age is maybe the ideal age to think about swimming lessons for a child? And is there ever an age that you're too old?

Tom Uvaas: No. Not at all. I worked with a 79-year-old. So it's not the issue. Three and four can work quite well if it's individual, if the water temperature is right. And I think, probably, kindergarten, first and second grade can work well. And then, of course, some people would say, "Well [inaudible 00:05:18] I'm ten years old. Never had a lesson. So I'm not going to take a lesson because I'm too old." That's not really true at all. You really want to ... number one you want to get comfortable in the water, so you can enjoy the lakes. We got a thousand lakes in our county. So this is something you, probably, want to do just because you want to really enjoy our

county.

Katie Johnson: Exactly. That brings me to the point as a parent or as an adult, if you have a fear of the water, do you have advice for how to not pass that fear onto your children?

Tom Uvaas: Well, I would say number one is just be honest with your children that you do have a fear. And by the way having a fear is very healthy. There's the opposite. We've seen people have no fear whatsoever and they get in big trouble. So having an honest fear is fine. And just generally working on it. But what's kind of fun though, when you watch your children take lessons, you could imagine that you're actually taking a lesson with them and then practicing the skills they have and before you know it, you might be less fearful.

Katie Johnson: Right. And learning together. That's right.

Tom Uvaas: That's right.

Katie Johnson: Any other tips you'd like to share with our listeners this morning when we think about being safe in, on and near the water this Fourth of July holiday?

Tom Uvaas: Well, maybe just one big one and that's this. You never know what the depth of the water is at lakes because they're not clear. Or even if they are clear, you don't know. So I would always say slip in entry. I mean that's where you sit down and you slide in the water. And a lot of people will say, "Well, I'm just going to jump in because it's not going to hurt my neck or whatnot." Well, if the water is very shallow and you jump in, you could really hurt your back a little bit. So slip in entry is really important. And then once you know what the depth of the water is and you know it's safe to possibly dive in, that's different but be cautious on that. And have a good time. Enjoy the water and relax and smile.

Katie Johnson: That's great advice. From Tom Uvaas swim instructor here at the Foss Swimming School at Lake Region Healthcare's Health and Wellness hub, swim coach and long time supporter of swimming as both a sport and a recreation in our community. Tom thanks so much for sharing your time with us today.

Tom Uvaas: It was a pleasure. Thank you Katie.

Katie Johnson: Tom Uvaas and Katie Johnson wishing you a happy and safe Fourth of July in, on or near the water, we're hoping. And reminding you that there is so much to do here. Stay healthy for it. Have a great day.