

Once upon a time I could walk into any of the five pools I worked at and be able to tell you how much chlorine was in it . . . to within about 1 part per million. It's a strange superpower, I'll admit, but the one I got.

I was in the water about 30 hours a week, and my skin hurt! I could not have anticipated how much more it would hurt to have a full body chemical burn from a grossly under powered water filtration system, twice.

I went to my trusted pool chemical guys and described the situation. They taught me some career changing things.

Chlorine (at pool water ratios) *doesn't* irritate the skin. "Combined chlorine" does. Combined chlorine is when lotions, body oils and dirt mix with the chlorine. Here's how to reduce your (and everyone's) combined chlorine exposure:

1. Get wet! Showering before you enter the pool does two things for your skin health.
 - It cleans lotions and even that little bit of sweat off your skin and out of your hair so it cannot combine with the chlorine,
 - AND it saturates your skin and hair with less chlorinated water from the shower, so it can't absorb as much of the higher chlorination from the pool water. Think of it this way, absorbing juice (chlorine) with a dry sponge is going to be much faster than trying to soak up the juice with a fully saturated (you after a shower) sponge. Be a wet sponge.
 - And while you're at it, making sure your bladder is on empty lessens combined chlorine too.
2. Neutralize. When you get out of the water, coat your skin with baking soda to neutralize the chlorine on a chemical level. You can put it in a spray bottle with water, or apply it directly. I do this right in the shower area so if I spill any on the floor, the water will rinse it away to minimize the slippery floor issue. You can use fancy products, vitamin C, or Epsom Salt as well but baking soda is safe, cheap and effective.
3. Rinse in cool water. (This keeps pores from enlarging and soaking up residue from the pool.)
4. Wash in hot water. Now that the surface of your skin is clean, shower in warm water to open up pores and sweat out anything that may have gotten in there. You can use soap if you like, but baking soda has already done the trick.
5. **Now** you may lotion. My favorite is coconut oil, but be sure to use it sparingly as to not stain your clothes. While you may be tempted to lotion or baby oil up before swimming, I hope you have been convinced that patience is a virtue.