

# Downeast Diving



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## **Tips for Drysuit Diving**

To get the most out of cold water diving you've got to have a drysuit. After several dives in a wetsuit at water temperatures colder than 65°F, your efficiency and abilities are seriously diminished. Below 55°F a drysuit is essential. To get the most out of a drysuit you need to understand how to use it. Drysuits aren't complicated, but if you don't know how to use one properly, you can damage your suit and/or injure yourself. The following tips will help you get the most out of your drysuit.

### **Make Sure Your Wrist and Neck Seals are Properly Trimmed and Adjusted**

Nothing is more uncomfortable than a drysuit neck or wrist seal that has not been properly trimmed or adjusted. If your suit is equipped with latex seals, they will usually be trimmed until the seal is about 15 percent smaller than the circumference of your neck or wrists. If your suit is equipped with neoprene seals, the seal should be stretched before use. Neck seals are usually stretched over the widest part of a scuba tank overnight. Wrist seals are usually stretched over a tin can. Check with your instructor or retailer for the exact procedure for your suit. A properly adjusted latex neck seal should be comfortable to wear topside and unnoticeable underwater. Don't use your suit in the water until the seals have been adjusted for you.

### **Check Your Suit at Least Two Days Before the Dive**

Drysuits are extremely reliable, but you should check your suit several days before the dive to make sure it's working properly, particularly if you haven't used it for a few months. Drysuits include such things as waterproof zippers, seals and valves. If you wait until the night before the dive to check your suit and something needs to be repaired, chances are you won't be able to get it fixed in time.

### **Change Your Insulation to Match the Water Temperature and Your Workload**

One of the great things about a drysuit is that you can use it in a broad range of water

temperatures. All you need to change is the insulation (underwear) you wear beneath the suit. Your insulation will vary according to the water temperature and your activity level. For example, during the summer months in Southern California, you might be able to dive with nothing more than a cotton sweatsuit underneath your drysuit. Yet, to dive the northern Channel Islands in January, you would probably want to wear drysuit underwear made from Thinsulate or Polartec, which provides substantially more insulation. Wear too much insulation on a dive during the summer and you'll overheat. Wear too little insulation on a dive in the winter and you'll be cold. You must learn to adjust your insulation, and the amount of weight you wear with it, from dive to dive.

## **Wear the Minimum Amount of Weight Possible**

Always wear the minimum amount of weight possible when diving with a drysuit. This is important because a minimum of weight will enable you to add the minimum amount of air to your drysuit to help control your buoyancy. Checking your buoyancy with a drysuit is almost exactly like checking your buoyancy with a wetsuit. Wearing full scuba, with all of the air out of your drysuit and BCD, take a full breath of air and hold it as you hang motionless vertically in the water. You should float at eye level. Exhale all of the air from your lungs and you should slowly begin to sink. These two conditions indicate you are neutrally buoyant. Once you've achieved neutral buoyancy, add just enough additional weight to compensate for the buoyancy change in your tank as it is emptied. You must be able to complete a hovering decompression stop at the end of your dive with 500 psi of air in your tank.

## **Always Wear a Buoyancy Compensator with a Drysuit**

It's essential to wear a buoyancy compensator whenever you use a drysuit. The BCD is used primarily for surface flotation but also provides backup flotation in the rare event of a drysuit failure. On the surface, the BCD helps relieve the pressure on the neck seal that would be caused by inflating the suit to establish positive buoyancy. In the unusual case where a drysuit will not hold air, a BCD is essential to establish positive buoyancy for surface swimming.

## **Dive with a Buddy Who Understands Your Drysuit System**

When you wear a drysuit, you can always use some help from your buddy, especially if your suit has a back zipper. A buddy who is drysuit savvy can also help make sure your neck seal is properly adjusted, as well as assist you in donning or doffing your suit.

## **Take a Drysuit Specialty Course**

The best way to learn to use a drysuit properly is to take a specialty course. In the past, divers learned to use their drysuits through trial and error, but drysuit specialty courses are available today that make learning simple. In addition, your instructor can help ensure you are properly weighted and help you avoid developing bad habits.

## **Practice Your Drysuit Diving Skills**

Once you have taken a drysuit diving specialty course, it's wise to practice your skills so they become second nature. For example, every diver who uses a drysuit must be able to recover from an upside down to an upright position. You must be able to quickly locate and disconnect your suit inflator hose and be able to operate its exhaust valve both manually and automatically. While none of these diving skills is difficult, each of them must be practiced on a regular basis to maintain your proficiency.

## **Maintain Your Drysuit Properly**

Drysuits require more maintenance than wetsuits. Be sure to rinse your suit with fresh, clean water after every dive. Inspect the seals, valves and zippers for damage and get repairs done on any item that is not operating properly. If the inside of the suit is damp or wet it must be rinsed, too. Check for moisture in the bottom of the boots. After rinsing the suit, hang it over a clothesline (out of the sun) to dry. Don't use a hanger as this places stress on the suit. Turn the suit inside out carefully. Never put your suit away for storage unless it is completely dry inside or you'll end up with mold or mildew. Drysuit zippers must be lubricated prior to every dive with bee's or paraffin wax. Only the outside of the zipper should be lubricated and it's best to do it with the zipper closed. Be sure to wipe off any bits of wax that fall off the zipper. Drysuit seals are best lubricated with pure talcum powder for donning, although you can also use corn starch or even soapy water if nothing else is available. Never use silicone spray on any part of your drysuit. It will work its way into the base suit material, making it difficult to make good repairs in the future. Different manufacturers recommend different methods for storage. Some say to roll the drysuit up and leave the zipper open, while others recommend closing the zipper. However, all manufacturers agree drysuits should be stored in a sealed bag in a cool, dry place, away from sources of ozone such as electric motors or hot water heaters. Follow these simple drysuit diving tips and you'll soon be diving like a pro. There's no substitute for a drysuit when the water turns chilly!