

FIVE TRICKS FOR TIME POOR SWIMMERS

Let's be honest, for most people, the swim portion of any triathlon is the most daunting by far. The training time it takes to prepare for the swim discipline is a big part of any triathlete's regime, especially for the novice and less experienced athletes. A number of factors combine to ensure that training becomes rather tricky when we talk swimming. Most of you will have jobs, families and other outside influences that make training for the swim extremely difficult. This article will hopefully contribute to you maximising your swim training time and delivering the best possible end result for you personally. We go in search of tricks of the trade for the weaker swimmers with limited time to spend on swim training.

1. Dry-land training.

It may sound rather daft, but you can maximise your swim training time and performances by spending less time in the water. "Impossible!" you say? "To swim better, I have to swim more." Not necessarily! The correct gym and proper technique dry-land training methods can mould a stronger athlete which in turn will improve your swimming times. You don't need a gym membership to make this happen. Stretch Cords (rubbers) are the easiest and most economical method to enhance one's swim performance standing on terra firma.

Wrap the cords around something secure and literally start dry-land swimming. Stretch cords will come with instructions and a little technical help from some experienced triathletes or swim coaches will get you up and running immediately. Done the correct way, a couple of hundred pulls per day or per week will increase your strength and help you swim faster. The stretch cords can be used any time of the day, at home and at work. Trust me on this one - with a proper technical pull, you can vastly improve your swimming times.

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2. Butterfly, butterfly and some more butterfly.

Don't panic! We don't need a technically sound stroke in this instance. In fact, it will work no matter how ugly the end result is. What we are looking for is the effort it takes to get the arms out of the water during the butterfly stroke. If you have attempted butterfly before, you will know how much harder it is to swim than freestyle.

If you haven't attempted butterfly, try it for one length and see for yourself how difficult it is. So you don't have much time to spend training in the pool? Swim more butterfly. You don't need to swim miles and miles of it either to get the full benefits. Start off slowly with a few 25m repeats per session and gradually build up the distance over the course of a few weeks. Butterfly swimming is great for building your endurance and will most certainly improve your swim times on less mileage. You can also use zoomer fins to assist you if you're not that adept at swimming butterfly. The Z2's work a charm for this.

3. Swim faster!

Yes, that does sound pretty daft. After all, that's the end result we are all chasing and lots of training time will produce this result, surely? Not necessarily! Far too often you find triathletes swimming miles and miles in the pool at a low-key intensity only to see the end result remain constant. Train slow and you will swim slow, no matter how many miles you manage to cram into your busy daily schedules. Hit the pool and swim hard and fast. A quick warm-up and then some high intensity repeats ranging from 25m right up to 400m will boost your swim performance quickly and with less training time. You still need a base and swimming long has its place but you have to mix it up a little and do some fast, high intensity swimming to maximise the gains. Swim fast and you will race faster! I use the SwimSense to take splits and assess each training session as I increase the speed work over the course of a few weeks. This allows for me to check the data and analyze the exact gains from a specific speed workout

Energy SPEED session sample.

200m easy swim/100m easy kick/200m easy pulling
8 x 25m maximum sprints, resting 15-30 seconds after each
100m easy recovery swim
2 x 400m repeats (swim the 2nd one faster than the 1st and take a 2 minute rest in between)
200-400m recovery choice.

4. Swim more often!

We know, we know. The reason you're reading this is because you don't have enough time to swim often. Swim more often when time is short and precious? Yes indeed. Provided you have access to a swimming pool nearby your work or home, it is far more beneficial to swim little and often rather than fitting all of your training into two or three days. By swimming for a shorter period more times per week you rack up roughly the same mileage, but the consistency and frequency of your training will enhance your swim performance over the long term. Combined with points 2 and 3, swimming more often (if possible and based on your own personal circumstances) and not necessarily swimming more miles will most definitely help you perform better at races.

5. Toys for Boys (and Girls)

Triathletes love gadgets and they do tend to spend a little extra cash on triathlon toys. Swim training is no different, so adding an arsenal of essential swim tools to the training bag can assist in making you a better swimmer when working under strict time constraints.

Zoomer Fins: A must for the novice and "sinker". Not to be used all the time, these fins are a definite advantage when starting out and in the early stages of your base training. They will help with your butterfly stroke technique and can be useful when adding some essential kicking training drills to improve the overall swimming stroke.

Freestyler paddles (www.finisinc.com): These give you a greater reach in the water through the arm pull stroke and assists in developing your technique. Unlike other paddles that look like painting pallets and are huge in size, these paddles actually improve the stroke form.

Swimmers Snorkel (www.finisinc.com): Not just for scuba diving, a snorkel allows you to concentrate on watching your arm through the pull motion by keeping your head and eyes firmly on looking ahead without the need to rotate the head to breathe. A "still" head also improves your posture and body position in the water. An added advantage of using the swimmers snorkel is the restriction of airflow into the lungs (it comes with an adapter to limit air flow) which builds your oxygen capacity in the lungs by forcing you to work harder on less oxygen supply. Also really cool for when you go on holiday and want to just chill in the ocean and watch nature go by!

For most people swimming will always be hard, but you can improve over time. Hopefully the above five pointers will make it somewhat easier to improve your swimming despite a busy lifestyle. Triathlon and swimming in particular are meant to be fun. Try and keep that attitude when you go out and put in the miles and the progress will soon follow.