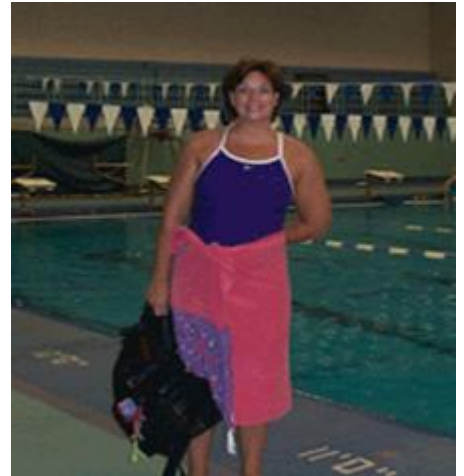


The Three Rs

By Sue Haugh, coach and active swimmer with Raleigh Area Masters



No, not reading, `riting, and `rithmetic. I`m referring to the Three R`s related to swimming. What are the Three R`s, you ask? Rhythm, Range, and Relaxation.

The first of the three R`s - ***Rhythm*** - is finding a rhythmical cycle that accommodates your stroke. The law of physics states that a body in motion tends to stay in motion. As like pushing a heavy object, once you keep it moving, it is easier than letting it slow down or stop; starting up or regaining speed takes more effort. Same with swimming. Avoid stoppage or slowing down in the rhythm of your stroke. Always keep one hand in contact with the water at all times (backstroke and freestyle). For short axis strokes (butterfly and breaststroke) it`s important to keep both arms or both legs (one or the other) in contact with the water at all times. Your goal is ultimate efficiency by maintaining momentum by catching the water with the flexing of the hand at the wrist. As the hand engages, hold it firmly while propelling the body forward until you have released the water as the body proceeds beyond your anchor point. Engage your larger muscle groups. Use your arms and shoulders, but also engage your back, lats, and shoulder blades as they are larger and stronger groups of muscle. Engage these stronger muscle groups by keeping pressure against your little and ring finger. By doing this, you are working more powerful muscles, allowing your shoulders and arms to become more relaxed.

Second R - ***Range*** - or distance per stroke, means the lengthening of your stroke. Whereas most animals increase speed by extending the length of their stride, unfortunately, swimmers tend not to do this. We tend to think this means a faster turn-over, thus more strokes. To get maximum distance per stroke cycle, one needs to focus on posture, alignment, balance, and technique. One must concentrate on sliding through the smallest possible area with minimum resistance and drag. Create the tightest, thinnest body line possible from fingertips to toes. Ever hear your coach say they want to see a "streamline" position? This is what they are referring to! You cannot allow any body parts or angles in the body line extend beyond your narrowest streamline. So in summary, the maximum distance per stroke is determined by the fewest number of stroke cycles in the least amount of time.

The third R - ***Relaxation*** - try not to carry too much tension in your muscles. Some tension in muscles creates power, but too much causes slowness of movement and rapid fatigue. Learn to carry tension in the working side of the stroke and maximum relaxation in the non-working side.

Oh, wait....let me throw one more R out there! ***Repetition*** - repeat, repeat, repeat. The only way to become successful is repetition of what you`ve learned. As someone once said...."you cannot become good while moving fast until you are perfect in slow motion"!

Reference: ASCA newsletter article by Nort Thornton