

Simple Swim Workouts

by Marty Gaal

What are a few simple swim workouts, and what are some simple sets or tips that can help increase my speed?

Swim training for triathlon and open water racing does not have to involve mind-twisting structured workouts, but your workouts should be more detailed than swimming 40-60 laps non-stop in a pool.

Swimming for ten, twenty, or thirty plus minutes non-stop is good general exercise, and will help you increase your speed and strength from a baseline level. However, without including some form drills and swim sets with rest in between intervals, you will plateau in speed and fitness in just a few weeks.

40 laps in a standard 25-yard pool is 2,000 yards. (A lap is 2 lengths of the pool). A very simple swim set that you could turn this into would involve a specific warm up, a few drills, and then what coaches and athletes call a main set. If you are unfamiliar with drills, there are plenty of online videos and instructional DVDs describing these.

- 5 x 100 (2 laps) warm up with 10-20 second rest between. Goal: To get the blood flowing to your muscles and loosen up your joints.
- Rest 1 minute (stretch, relax)
- 6 x 50 (1 lap) form drills with 20-30 second rest between. Goal: Working on improving your technique which is a critical step to becoming a faster swimmer.
- Rest 1 minute
- 10 x 100 higher effort than steady swimming with between 10 to 30 seconds rest. Goal: To increase your effort into the 80-90% of maximum range. If you are a newer swimmer, keep this closer to 80% and take more rest. Experienced swimmers swim closer to 90% and take less rest. This is roughly lactate threshold pace, or the fastest pace you might attempt to hold in a sprint or Olympic-distance triathlon.
- Rest 1 minute
- 1 x 100 kicking. Goal: Don't ignore your kick in swim training
- 1 x 100 easy. Goal: Cooling down and stretching out.

There are plenty of other ways to break up your laps. However, most good swim workouts will be based on some variation of the above theme: Warm up, Drill set, Main set, Cool down. Kick sets can be included anywhere in the workout and could be the main set if you are inclined to kick a bunch one day.

Simple sets to increase speed include main sets like the above example, as well as drill sets, which work on the streamline or hydrodynamic component of your swimming ability. Other simple sets to include are sets like:

- 8 x 50 start each one easy and 'build' each to fast effort while maintaining good form. Rest 20-30 seconds between each
- 8 x 25 fast/hard while maintaining good form. Rest as much as you need to catch your breath.
- 4 x 200 negative split – first 100 is easy to moderate and the second 100 is moderate hard to hard. Rest 20 seconds to 1 minute between each.

You could do these as your main set, as part of your main set, or as a final set after your main set.

See you in the pool!

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