

A Well-Rounded Workout

Twenty Ingredients for Total Training

Can you imagine following a nutritional plan of only two or three items, consumed day after day, month after month? Perhaps all you eat each day for a year is chicken, potatoes and bread. Not only would such a diet become monotonous, in the long term you would not meet the basic nutritional requirements for adequate physical development.

Swim training follows the same train of thought. If you were to head to the pool each day and complete the same basic work out each visit, you may be driven to the brink of boredom- and beyond! While you might receive certain physical benefits from such a plan, the benefits can be greatly enhanced by adding variety to your swimming work out.

While some adult swimmers choose to chart a carefully-constructed plan to peak performance, many swimmers prefer to have a stimulating, entertaining and challenging work out session and are not as concerned about the impact of the work out on future performances. With a wide-open approach for each work out, the sky is the limit in terms of variety. Any coach or swimmer would be wise to include as most, if not all, of the following 20 ingredients in each work out.

Three Modes

Swim – This is an obvious ingredient – the meat in the hamburger, the milk in the shake. This is the natural approach, with no equipment or training aids added.

Kick – The legs are not to be ignored in the pool, and kicking can be included in a myriad of ways. Vary your position by kicking on your side, back, front and vertically, with and without fins and kickboard. Underwater dolphining can be included in any work out.

Pull – Insert the buoy to give the legs a break and add some emphasis on your upper body. Some swimmers prefer to use hand paddles to create additional resistance in the stroke.

Four Strokes

Freestyle – The majority of swimmers begin their work out with freestyle and use it as their primary stroke in practice. It's an effective way to begin a work out, as it may be performed in a relaxed manner by almost any swimmer.

Backstroke – Backstroke, in general, may be the easiest stroke for beginners to perform as it affords the swimmer a certain freedom to breathe. Backstroke is a great stroke for relaxing after a taxing set or cooling down at the end of a session.

Breaststroke – Because the breaststroke pull, kick and body action can require a higher level of power and explosiveness, it is advisable to slowly warm up to this stroke. Begin with light kicking, then an extended, gliding stroke before bringing it to full speed.

Butterfly – Even a short butterfly swim such as 25 or 50 metres can raise the heart rate substantially, so it is best to prepare for full stroke fly by performing less-strenuous drills, such as one-arm fly or dolphin kicking.

The Technique Triple

Drills – There are an endless number of drills in the four strokes that are designed to help swimmers to perform the strokes more efficiently. For example, a swimmer may want to improve his or her breaststroke by swimming a 2 kick/1 pull, during which the swimmer takes 2 consecutive kicks, maximizing distance per kick and streamlining, followed by 1 arm stroke (with breath).

Turns – In a 25metre pool, swimmers spend much of the time approaching the wall, executing a turn and gaining distance off the wall. If feasible, block starts and race finishes may be practiced as well.

Sculling – While some swimmers may have an enhanced feel for the water, either inherently or through years of development, all swimmers can improve their kinaesthetic awareness through various sculling drills and positions.

Three Gears of Speed

Slow – Whether it's the first lengths of practice or recovery swimming well into the work out, slow swimming gives the swimmer a chance to relax in the water and enjoy the experience without discomfort.

Moderate – Most swimming in a work out is likely in this category and may be classified as aerobic training.

Fast – While swimming at or near top gear is not recommended for the entire work out, a few sprints and quick swims will challenge the swimmer and provide enhanced physical benefits.

Four Equipment Items

Pull Buoy – Many adult swimmers have an intimate relationship with their pull buoy, which provides lower body lift and relief for runners and triathletes with fatigued legs.

Fins – These may be the most popular items on pool deck, outside of goggles. Fins provide speed assistance and lift and can be used as a teaching tool in all strokes.

Paddles – Caution is the key word in using paddles, as they create additional work for the shoulder region. Use wisely.

Kickboard – While using a kickboard can create an unbalanced body position while kicking, adult swimmers often enjoy the opportunity to "sightsee" and socialize during kicking sets.

While there many other uses of training equipment, such as snorkels and stretch cords, these four items are among the most commonly used.

Take two: Start and Finish

Warm Up – Every workout should include an initial phase that allows the swimmer to acclimatize to the water and prepare physiologically for training.

Swim Down – Likewise, after a solid effort, the body needs to gradually return to its normal resting state. Use the last few minutes of practice to swim easily.

One Breath

Hypoxic Training – Swimmers who race regularly do so in oxygen-deprived states, if only for a few seconds. Hypoxic training (without oxygen) in moderate amounts can not only prepare a swimmer to race, but can be an effective drill for teaching relaxed swimming over short distances.