

## 6 Common Swimming Myths, Debunked by Julia Galan - August 5, 2014 Ironman.com article

If the swim is holding you back, read on to make sure one of these misconceptions isn't keeping you in the slow lane. Ask a group of triathletes what they dread most about racing and they will often cry out, "the swim!" Many triathletes come from a running or cycling background and find the swim to be their weakest link—the discipline that holds them back from achieving their potential. Unfortunately, their frustration with swimming is often reinforced by an incorrect approach to training and a lack of understanding about this very technical and demanding sport. A strong swimming foundation will, ideally, provide an edge over the competition, put less pressure on the joints and leave triathletes with more energy for the bike and run. But just getting in the pool and swimming won't unlock all of these benefits. Below are six misconceptions that many triathletes have about swimming, along with some clarifications that will help you make the most of the sport and improve your overall triathlon performance.

### 1) Technique is for the weak; fitness is the key to success in swim training

Many triathletes are convinced that muscling through a workout is the shortest route to a faster swim, and that focusing on technique is a waste of time. Yet in the swim portion of a triathlon, fitness alone will not win the game. Rather, it is a combination of efficiency and speed that will help you not only go faster, but preserve energy for the run and swim. Why? Water is about 800 times denser than air. Swimming puts you in the thick of tremendous water resistance, and learning how to reduce that resistance (by working on streamlining, body balance and symmetry in the water, for example) plays a major role in improvement. This is why you need a balanced training plan incorporating drills and technique work with speed work and interval-based sets. Hundreds of drills exist, each designed to address a specific area of a specific swimmer's stroke that needs improvement. This makes it difficult to find the right drills for your exact needs. This is where a coach—who can assess your stroke individually and let you know exactly which drills to use and how often—can push you forward.

### 2) Freestyle is the only stroke triathletes need to use

The freestyle stroke is, of course, essential for a triathlete. Learning a few other strokes, however, will help you in several ways. First, given that the four strokes are interconnected, strengthening one stroke will also transfer to the others. Second, the variety in your workout will help to strengthen the muscles and joints in different ways and thus avoid repetitive motion injuries. Finally, learning another stroke or two can aid you in a race. Knowledge of the backstroke, for example, will allow you to take a break during the race without necessarily having to stop.

### 3) Kicking is overrated

The kick is the true engine of the stroke, but is also frequently overlooked or ignored by triathletes. Because it's difficult and frustrating to develop an effective kick, the solution for many has been to simply abandon it. Many triathletes are told to "save their legs" during the swim portion of the race because kicking wastes energy. This could not be further from the truth. An effective kick offers enhanced propulsion and lift, helps to increase your distance per stroke and takes the main burden off of your arms and shoulders. Instead of giving up on the kick, focus on improving your kicking technique and strength.

### 4) You don't need to hydrate while swimming

I'm in the water and I don't feel thirsty—why should I need to drink? Lauren Trocchio from Nutrition Unlocked said that the inability to observe sweating makes it easy for many swimmers to overlook the importance of hydrating while working out or competing. "Hydration is no less important for swimmers and can sometimes be even more critical due to hot and humid environments," she says. So bring a water bottle to every practice and every race.

### 5) You need to swim continuously

Triathletes often believe that swimming continuously builds endurance. While it's important to incorporate longer swims into your workouts, swimming continuously should not constitute the sole component of your swim training. Dividing up your workout into shorter, interval-based sets will add in rest and recovery periods that will allow you to build endurance and increase your fitness *without* getting overly fatigued and losing your technique. There are many types of interval-based sets to try, from fixed rest sets to broken swims to pyramid sets to advanced intervals. A mix of continuous swims, drill work and interval-based sets is the perfect combination.

### 6) The bigger your paddles and fins, the more you'll improve

There is a wealth of swimming equipment on the market, from fins, to pull buoys, to stroke rate devices and more, offering enticing ways to spice up a workout. While basic swimming tools can serve a variety of purposes in swim training, they can also become a detriment. Swimmers will often rely on equipment to boost their workout—fins increase speed, for example, while pull buoys correct body position in the water. Unfortunately, the good feeling swimmers get from their gear often leads to overuse, which prevents the swimmer from developing proper technique unaided. When race day arrives and the tools are put away, swimming will feel slower and more difficult. Equipment can play an important role in helping a swimmer progress, but only if used properly and appropriate to the individual swimmers' needs. Everything in moderation is a good mantra to remember.

Talk to your coach, or take another look at your swim training with these considerations. You might just find that improvement is waiting for you on the pool deck, ready to be seized.