



Swim Workout Descriptions

Swim workouts are very different from bike and run workouts. We use intervals relatively sparingly in bike and run training, but there are typically multiple intervals sets of different intensities and purposes in a single swim workout. Technique drills also play a fairly small role in bike and run training but should be included in almost every swim workout.

Why are swim workouts so different? The simple answer is that experience has shown that emphasizing intervals and drills in swim training produces better results - and this is particularly true of non-swimmers taking up the sport of triathlon.

Because they are so different from bike and run workouts, swim workouts will be structured differently. They will have blocks of intervals dedicated to different objectives. These blocks include a warm-up, a drill set, one or more main sets, occasionally a kick set, and a cool down. These will be spelled out for you. A number in parenthesis (20") indicates your recovery between intervals.

Warm-Up Sets

The purpose of a warm-up set is to gently prepare your body for the rest of the swim workout. Always perform your warm-up at recovery intensity - see the chart, below, for a graphic depiction of the various intensities.

Drill Sets

Technique drills are critical to improvement in swimming. Whether you are a beginner or a former college all-American, you need to do them. The primary key to improvement in swimming is increasing your efficiency in the water: using less energy to make greater forward progress. Building swim-specific, cardiovascular fitness, while important, does very little to increase efficiency. Technique improvements are the best way to become more efficient, and drills are one of the best ways to improve technique. The majority of your swim workouts should include a drill set.

There is a large number of swim drills to choose from. Please review the description of specific drills at www.tri-fyt.com/racing. Practice at least two and as many as six different drills in each drill set. I will not be specifying specific drills; you need to choose those based on the inefficiencies in your stroke. I can work with you on this. It is a good idea to do each of the swim drills at least occasionally and then focus on those that address the biggest problem areas in your stroke.

Main Sets

Main sets are the meat of the swim workout. There are six types of main set: base intervals, swim time trials, speed intervals, lactate intervals, threshold intervals, and fartlek intervals.

Base Intervals

Base intervals are freestyle swim intervals performed at moderate aerobic intensity and separated by short recoveries (5-15 seconds). Occasionally, we will do a single long (unbroken) swim, in which case there is no rest. These build aerobic fitness, endurance, and efficiency.

Swim Time Trials

In a swim time trial, you swim a given distance as fast as possible. Swim time trials help prepare you for the specific demands of racing and allow you to gauge your current swim performance level.

Speed Intervals

Speed intervals are very short intervals swum at speed intensity (As fast as you can maintain through the entire set without slowing). Doing them will increase your maximum swim speed, your efficiency, and your ability to quickly recover from hard swimming.

Lactate Intervals

Lactate intervals are middle-length intervals swum at VO2 max intensity (the fastest pace you could maintain for 10 minutes). They will maximize your swim-specific aerobic capacity and improve your ability to sustain faster swim speeds.

Threshold Intervals

Threshold intervals are longer intervals swum at (as you guessed) threshold intensity. Threshold intervals significantly increase your intensive endurance, or the time you are able to maintain a relatively fast swim speed.

Fartlek Intervals

Fartlek intervals comprise alternating segments of easy and hard swimming. Swim the easy segments at moderate aerobic intensity and the hard segments at threshold intensity.

Kick Sets

Many of the swim workouts call for a kick set between the main set(s) and the cool-down. In a kick set, you swim by flutter kicking only, either on your side, on your back, or belly down - with or without a kickboard. You may also wear fins during a kick set. This increases the load on your legs, which, in turn, increases the power-building effect. The main benefit of doing kick sets is to develop a more powerful and efficient kick.

Cool-down Sets

It is helpful to swim a few easy laps at the end of each swim workout. A good cool-down clears metabolic wastes from your muscles and gently prepares your body to return from a stress state to a rest state. Swim your cool-down set at recovery intensity.