

**Splash Magazine – USA Swimming
Sport Psychology/Mental Training Q &A
Chris Carr, Ph.D.**

Can you help me? See I swim really hard at my 2 hour long practices. I mean i can sprint almost all of the practice, and my technique has been improving a lot. My coaches even tell me i am one of the hardest workers they have ever seen. It's just that when it comes to swimming the meets my mind goes blank, i start freaking out thinking about my competition, i think about the times too much, and i get really nervous. Then when i get in the water it seems like i have never swam before.... i swim horrible. I also have my goals on an index card on my wall and i just can't seem to reach them during meets. I really want to go far in life with swimming but i don't think i can if i have trouble swimming at meets. Please give me some advice, i realli need it i'm lost

Your concerns are quite common with athletes, especially swimmers. The ability to have a good mental routine for both practice and meets is essential to obtaining a desired performance. I encourage swimmers to focus on a few basic mental "skills" to help them with pre-meet anxiety. First, develop a consistent goal-setting routine for practices, but focus on 2 or 3 simple goals (instead of time goals)....for example, "Take a deep breath before each interval set". When you practice goal setting, it helps to direct and guide your focus. Second, begin practicing relaxation techniques. Even though I make relaxation CD's for the athletes I work with, anyone can find a relaxation CD at a music store or online. Start to practice relaxation techniques 4-5 X/week and see if you can learn how to "control" your anxiety before practices/meets (plan on feeling more excited and anxious before a meet). Finally, have a pre-race mental "routine" that focuses you on the controllables in your race (e.g. your feelings/thoughts when you swim fast). So when you get behind the blocks, take a deep breath, let go of your tension, and focus on a "cue" (one word/phrase) that describes how you feel when you swim fast....then "get the butterflies in formation" and Go! Good Luck!

I love swimming, I'm just a little burnt out. I need some help, Two a days and high-school are killing me. My parents are forcing me never miss a practice and I think I'm TOO OVERWHELMED. How do I get some time for myself?

Jonathan

Jonathan,
Feeling "burned out" is common with swimmers. After all, you spend hours of time in a pool with your face in the water, your arms/legs hurting, and little time to talk/interact with your teammates. Yet, it is because of this that swimmers "embrace" their sport...they realize that they can push themselves and deal with difficult training. And when the season ends (taper meets), they will feel fast and smooth. Finding "balance" is important. Here are some "tips": First, keep a mental training journal. Every other night, you can sit and just write about your feelings/experiences in the journal. This will often help you to "let go" of those negative thoughts and distractions by giving you some clarity. Second, start a regular routine of relaxation training. Find a relaxation CD and listen to it 4-5x each week. This 15-20 minutes can be a great time to "refocus" and "regroup"; this will help you feel less stress. Also, make sure to do some time management strategies, such as keeping your schedule in a planner. When we feel overwhelmed, we often tend to let the "little things" get to us....a good time management strategy helps us to focus on what we can control (and let go of what we don't control). If these techniques don't help, try to find a sport psychologist in your area that may help you with some of your stress management.....Good luck!