

Erin Shaw – swimming tips and nutrition

Training tips

- Start training early for the swim and swim in the ocean as well as the pool and possibly the river if you prefer.
- Practise “sighting” as you swim and also swim with your paddler so that you are used to working together.
- At this stage you should be aiming for 3 – 4 solid swimming sessions per week for solos and duos with one longer session (4.5 - 5km) and increase your distances as you go
- The last stages of training you should be doing excessive of 30km with one session a week 8-10km
- All training needs to be a mix of sets. This helps prevent boredom and assists with building both endurance and speed. A great set for a good long distance workout is 10 to 12 400’s freestyle. Include a warm up and a cool down and always include some backstroke in your warm up and cool down to help open up the shoulders
- Julian Mills made a point that this level of training is very difficult to do on your own.
- To help overcome this difficulty it is a good idea is to join a swim squad and have a team around you that share a similar goal. This assists with motivation and having a laugh never goes astray when you are working so hard. It also gives you the opportunity to work off other swimmers to help gauge your improvement.
- Having a plan in place for the morning of the swim is very important so that all parties know exactly what to expect on the day, resulting in everyone being where they need to be and on time.
- Include in your swim preparation finding the right swim suit. A good idea is to complete a few training sessions in the swim suit you would like to wear on the day so that it isn’t completely new for the swim. Then if it isn’t comfortable you have time to choose another.
- Men need to shave so that you don’t tear your shoulders apart with your beard
- Reapply sunscreen during the swim often.
- Get your stroke looked at if you are experiencing discomfort and take advice from your swim squad coach.
- Record your swimming sets and how you feel after them so you can visualise what you are doing and how to improve.

Nutrition

- You can expect to burn 600 – 900 calories per hour during the swim and even more if the temperature is cold as your body will be trying to keep warm so having some fat reserves prior to the swim is not a bad thing.
- Recognise that you will get cold. When you are on the boat you will need to dry down and rug up. Everybody is different and you need to understand your own body.
- Remember that in the lead up the event whilst you are training, you perspire and you need to replenish food and fluids during each session.
- As a general rule during the swim you need to eat every 20-30 minutes without fail. If you think you can swim that little bit further without the meal break you will pay for it at the end of the race. Start thinking about how you will get food passed to you from the support boat. A good meal plan not only saves time but will prevent you from getting cold waiting in the water or possibly dropping food in choppy conditions. Soggy food is bad food!!!

- You will need to eat carbohydrates at a rate of approximately 60gms an hour and even more for bigger swimmers. Start thinking about how to achieve this and what it will consist of. It is important in the lead up to the swim to try different foods and work out what suits you best. Make sure these foods make you feel good and are easy to consume in the water.
- “Real food” is becoming more popular with endurance athletes. So try things like honey sandwiches, rice cakes with Nutella or jam, cereal bars etc.
- Rotate eating real food with gels as the ability to chew is mentally stimulating. If you are eating a lot of carbo gels it is common to experience stomach cramps by the 17-18km mark.
- Swimmers should be consuming 600 – 1,000mls of fluid each hour during the event.
- Alternate drinking water with sports and electrolyte drinks. It is your job to experiment with what brands, flavours and temperature you like. There is no point taking something that is untried just because someone told you it was good. If you don't like the taste you won't drink it and this is a recipe for disaster on the day.
- Remember to have a post-race and training snack as it will try to prevent you from becoming unwell. When your body is under stress your immunity levels will decrease.
- For optimum nutrition results: train as though you are competing. This is an opportunity to trial different snacks to find out what works best for you. You need to match your daily energy output with carbohydrates, protein and nutrient needs in your training program.

Carbo Loading

On the morning of the race you must eat. Some swimmers prefer to race on an empty stomach but the Channel swim is a long day for nearly all swimmers and starting the day correctly is extremely important. Some people don't tolerate juice as the acidity upsets the stomach and conversely so can milk so this is something that you need to work on prior the day so that you can get it right too.

- Carbo loading is a strategy that helps you maximise the amount of muscle glycogen or carbohydrate stores prior to an event. It helps to improve the performance of an athlete during endurance exercise by allowing them to work at their optimum rate for longer. The more prepared you are before you start the race the longer you will sustain your best effort. This is why it is important to 'top up' the whole way during the race. You cannot store enough glycogen before the race to last the whole day.
- In the 1 to 4 days leading up to the event you should be in the final phase of your taper. It is common to feel like you are jumping out of your skin as you will feel fitter, healthier and you are starting to get excited about the upcoming race. It is recommended you should be consuming 7-12 grams per kilo of body weight. For example if you weigh 80kgs, you will need 960gms of carbohydrates per day approximately.

Common mistakes when carbo loading.

- **YOU MUST TAPER.** If you don't taper you will be using up all the energy you are trying to store.
- Start to cut back on the amount of fibre you are eating and eat high carb/low fat foods. Eat natural forms of carbohydrates like potatoes and generally stay clear of acidic and creamy foods. Especially when choosing pasta sauces, a lot are very high in fat.
- Consume compact forms of carbohydrates like cordial, sugar, sports drinks, jam, honey and tinned fruit. Remember you need to eat a lot of slices of bread to accomplish a good carb level and you will more than likely lose interest before you eat the required amount!!

Beware of savoury foods as they can also be a high source of salt which means you can over indulge in your fluid intake and possibly cause fluid retention.

- Recommend snacks during the race to get your energy levels back up include rice cakes with Nutella, rice cream, tinned fruit, bananas and treats such as a jam donut, a red bull or flat soft drink (flat means it will be less gassy). Soft drink and chocolate or lollies should only be consumed at the very final stages of the swim for that final burst of much needed energy.

In conclusion

- Eat sensibly in the lead up to the event during training, don't listen to all the hype, you know your body better than anyone else.
- Lay off the booze
- Don't drink the sea water
- Be very sun aware
- Listen to your support team – they will know if something is going wrong well before you do. If they tell you it's time to get out, 99.9% of the time they will be right.
- Good luck, train hard and have a great day.