

What does **READY** feel like?

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Warming up is something all swimmers do to prepare to swim fast. Why warm up? From a scientific standpoint we know that an effective warm up:

- Increases body temperature
- Increases heart rate
- Increases blood pressure
- Increases energy-producing enzyme activity

As coaches we observe that an effective warm up:

- Increases confidence by giving swimmers a feel for the pool, the water temperature, wall, flags, blocks and general conditions, (increases familiarity with the race conditions).
- Increases race readiness through the opportunity to rehearse specific pacing and stroking strategies.

The overall aim of warm up is to get your mind and body "READY" to race fast. How many times has your coach or your swim team friends asked "So, are you ready?"

But what does "READY" feel like? What's "ready" for you may not be "ready" for someone else.

- Some swimmers like to sit with friends and family, laughing and joking to help them feel ready.
- Some swimmers prefer to do just the opposite - they need peace and quiet to perform at their best.
- Others like to listen to music, some read, a few walk, others talk, some jog ...there are many ways that swimmers prepare to get the best out of themselves.
- The key to an effective warm up is to know what your own personal "READY" feels like before you get to a meet.
- It doesn't make sense to prepare for months, commit yourself to training and working hard, eating the right foods and so on then not knowing what actually gets you "ready to race".
- One simple way to learn what your "ready" is all about is to write down everything you can about your race day routine. Simple things like the quality and quantity of sleep, your breakfast, your stretches and your pool warm up can have a real impact on your racing performance.
- At your next minor meet or local club competition, try the "what ready feels like for me" questionnaire. Fill it out and then discuss the results with your coach.

In this way, if you swim well, you will know exactly what makes you "ready" and if you don't swim well, you'll know what to do better (or to avoid) next time. A few little tips to help you get ready on race day:

1. The Swim Meet Program tells you only two things - what lane you are in and what race you are in. All other information is relatively unimportant. Many swimmers get "freaked out" when they look in the meet program and see the entry times listed by the other swimmers. It doesn't matter who you are racing or what times they may have claimed to have done, your job is the same - swim to the best of your ability. If Michael Klim is on one side of you and Alex Popov on the other side, you still have to swim the same race distance, in the same water, in a lane that is the same length and width. The race credentials of other swimmers have no bearing on your own swimming performance.
2. If you are not ready to race, do something about it before the race. Going to your coach at the end of the day and saying "I really wasn't ready to swim fast" is not an excuse for a poor performance. If you are not ready - do something to get ready.
3. Being ready is an individual thing. If you are not feeling ready to swim fast and your swim team friends are off to the showers, don't go with them just to be sociable. If you are not ready to do your best, do more warm up, or rest, or go for a jog, or skip, or eat something, or sleep, or talk to your coach - just do it! You can catch up on the meet chat later.
4. Pack in your swim bag all the things you need to get ready to race. If you are a reader, pack a few books. If you like music, pack your favourite tapes or CD's. If you like to sleep, pack your own pillow. Take what you need to get the job done.
5. Ignore 90% of what you hear said in the changerooms and marshalling area. Every competitive swimmer has heard questions like "What time do you do?" or "How many sessions a week do you swim?" etc in the marshalling area. Would you like to know a little secret? Most of it is 100% pure rubbish. The swimmers who try this cheap attempt at "psyching out" are usually the ones who have not prepared for the meet themselves and are looking to make up for their poor preparation by making you feel less confident. Do not listen to them. Or have a clever answer for them. If you get asked "What's your best time", answer "I'll tell you after this race".
6. A good "get ready" trick if you haven't had time to practice race starts as part of your pool warm up is to do a few dry starts. Find a clear, flat space (ideally on grass) somewhere around the pool area where you can hear the starter. A good time to do this is around 15-20 minutes before your race. When the starter says "Take Your Marks" to the swimmers on the blocks about to race, drop into your race start position on the grass and when the gun (or horn) goes, jump forward fast with explosive speed and power. This is a great exercise to get your brain and muscles firing and prepares you to explode off the blocks when it is your time to race.

If you want to race real fast,
And never be the one to come in last,
Learn what gets your body ready,
And when it counts you'll be the one who's steady!