

# Workouts and the Common Cold

When swimmers show signs of a common cold should they continue to practice?

Sometimes over ambitious swimmers, coaches, and parents choose to treat a cold as a simple inconvenience and push on toward that all important qualifier meet in February.

Using common sense with the common cold is the best policy. Some "colds" may be far more serious infections waiting to become more intense as stress increases and resistance weakens.

Anthony Verde, PhD, exercise physiologist at the Sports Medicine Center in Wayne, Pennsylvania, stated in the June 1990 issue of *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, "You have a good chance of turning a cold into something more severe by exercising with any intensity during the incubation stage."

However, in the same article, Harvey Simon, MD, assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School provides the following advice to physicians, "Try to reassure your patients that colds and exercise do not interact in major ways. If anything, anecdotal evidence says that some athletes feel better exercising with colds. This would make sense because exercise can increase mucus flow, which might provide relief for upper respiratory tract symptoms."

Edward Eichner, MD, professor of medicine at the University of Oklahoma and an editorial board member of *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* has found that physicians who regularly treat athletes with colds use the following guidelines: (Also from the June 1990 issue of *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*.)

"If the symptoms are located above the neck (runny nose, sneezing, scratchy throat), then exercise is safe...[however] athletes should not exercise with below-the-neck symptoms such as fever, muscle aches, loss of appetite, and hacking cough with sputum production."

Some parents wonder if it is permissible for swimmers to participate in dryland activities and avoid the water during colds. In fact, breathing the super humid air at the water surface may help relieve cold symptoms. So long as athletes do not have a fever, history of serious virus infections of which the cold may just be the beginning of, or feel weak and lethargic, a light to moderate swimming workout may be beneficial. The Swim Parents Newsletter editorial staff recommends the conservative policy of always checking with your family physician and encourages swimmers, coaches, and parents to remember that an upcoming qualifying meet is not as important as a child's opportunity to recover from a cold.