

## 7 Ways to Swim Fearlessly in 2015

I'm afraid of an assortment of things. Rejection. Regrets. My Wi-Fi dropping.

Some people are scared of the usual stuff – the dark, spiders, snakes and so on. But there are other, less obvious forms of fear that manifest themselves within swimmers. Less subtle. Hiding under the cloak of denial. Fear of success, fear of failure, the fear of expanding our limits.

### **WHY DO WE GET SCARED WITH OUR SWIMMING?**

Fear hits us from a bunch of different angles. Some obvious, some of them so hidden and sneaky that we don't really realize their existence or impact until we sit down with them.

- Fear of racing our heart out and coming up short.
- Fear of looking "slow" or inferior in front of other swimmers, coaches and your parents.
- Fear of not being in control.
- Fear of disappointing ourselves, as well as our loved ones and teammates.
- Fear of going beyond our comfort zone and challenging ourselves to heights we only sort of consider ourselves capable of.

I admit, the article title was a little misleading. The goal isn't to swim or live completely without fear. That's like saying we should not get nervous before our races. If we're not nervous, we're not invested, and if we're not invested then what's the point, right?

The goal with these tips isn't so much to eliminate fear, but rather manage them so that they don't dictate our swimming. Here goes—

**1. Identify Them.** This can be tricky. Some swimmers will instinctively pound their chest and say, "I'm never scared." (Hello, denial!) Once we acknowledge the fear, realize why we are feeling that way, we can begin to respond to it in a manner that isn't purely based in emotion. Take a few moments and write 'em out. (I'll wait here.) Putting them to paper stops the pin-balling thoughts in your head from running loose. Seeing those fears in ink and shedding light on them generally renders them moot.

**2. What is the worst that could happen?** When you take a moment to actually sit down and fully consider the worst case scenario you begin to see the cracks in fear's reasoning. Got DQ'd in your best race of the meet? Your family still loves ya, you're still a swimming machine, and there will be more races in the future. In other words, life will go on.

**3. Consider the Odds.** Here's a little something you may not fully realize about yourself. Out of all the doomsday scenarios you've concocted in your mind, how many of them have actually come true? Out of the dozens, hundreds or thousands of stinky situations your mind imagined, how many of them actually happened? A couple? Probably even less than that. It should be a comfort knowing that we are actually quite terrible at predicting terrible outcomes. The next time fear rears it's ugly face remember that an over-whelming proportion of them will never come to pass.

**4. Accept unpredictability.** As much as we love to think we are in utter control, there are some limits. As much as I want to be Batman, it's just not in the cards. Do what you can with what you have, and forget the things you don't have control of. Easier said than done, but embracing the unpredictability of life will allow you to focus on the things you *do* have control over.

**5. Risk vs Reward.** The cost of not acting, of not swimming your brains out, should be higher than your dooms-day scenario. In other words, understanding that the pain of regret outweighs giving a full effort should motivate you to follow the path that would result in less pain or disappointment.

**6. Trust yourself.** Think back to the last time something truly awful happened with your swimming. The morning your goggles filled up and you missed a AAA cut by 4/100's. Leaving early on the take over that would have won your team the meet. The time your suit fell around your knees off the start and you swam the first 50 metres bare-butt. How long did it take you to get over these things? A couple weeks? A few days? Hours or minutes, even? (Though I'm sure you still get ribbed for the 50m bare-butt.)

**7. Unshackle yo'self with action.** Setting daily, weekly challenges or benchmarks that are designed to push you past your self-imposed limitations and boundaries will help lessen the grip that fear has on you. Fear is designed to keep you in place, from not moving, from not acting.