

The Master's Day

How to Manage training around life and life around training

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The greatest challenge for any Masters swimmer is to manage training around life (or is it the other way around?).

Whilst it would be great to have the world stop so you could train whenever you wanted to, the reality is that work, family, study and other life issues are always going to be there – and therefore for the Masters swimmer – life and training need to be balanced and managed.

So what would be a great Masters day: one that would allow you to do what you **have to do** but still create the environment to get the most out of what you **want to do**.

6:00 AM – Get up (before the kids). Grab a rug or yoga mat and do ten minutes of gentle stretching. Then work on “the basics” some good old fashioned swimming strength training exercises: sit ups, push ups, dips – all modified for your own personal level of fitness of course.

Set a target for your exercises – a good system is the UNITS system. Each sit up / push up / dip etc is ONE UNIT. On the first morning, aim to do a total of 30 UNITS – this could be ten sit ups, five dips, three push ups, another ten sit ups and a few step ups. The next morning aim for 31. Then 32 the next day. And so on. Soon you will be doing a hundred general body strengthening exercises with ease.

6:30 AM – Healthy breakfast. With all the usual suspects - whole grain toast, fruit, low fat yoghurt, muesli or a similar grain based cereal (natural not baked, fried or toasted), coffee if you want to (with low fat milk if that's your preference).

8:00 AM – Getting to work or study. When time is short, the critical factor in maintaining a successful exercise program is efficiency in using your time. If you drive, park a few blocks away from the office and walk ten-fifteen minutes to work. If you can, ride a bike to work. Or if possible jog to work once or twice a week. There are plenty of creative ways to get more fitness into your life.

The critical issue is clothes!!!

Try this routine:

- **MONDAY** – Drive to work and take with you a few days of clothing changes (i.e. work clothes and training gear)
- **TUESDAY** – Gym at lunchtime
- **WEDNESDAY** – Ride to work. Ride home.
- **THURSDAY** – Lunchtime swim.
- **FRIDAY** – Drive to work to collect your pile of dirty work and training clothes!

10:00 AM – Fuel!!! Eat something healthy and nutritious. Fruit is always a great option.

1:00 PM – Lunch. How about two meat and salads sandwiches on whole wheat bread with no mayo? Or how about a tuna and salad wrapped in pita bread? Or chicken and salad on a large whole wheat bread roll? Or if you are well organized and have the opportunity how about a bowl of pasta with a tomato based sauce that you made up last night and carried to work in a plastic container to reheat in the office microwave? The principles of a great lunch are:

- Light foods (heavy foods / high fat foods tend to make you feel slow and sluggish in the afternoon)
- Plenty of salad / vegetables
- Low Fat
- High fibre
- Low salt
- Low processed sugars
- As natural as possible
- Limited use of butter, heavy sauces and mayo

If you have a flexible work environment, you may be able to fit in a short swim, a jog or a gym session at lunch time followed by a light meal – like snacking on a salad sandwich at the desk.

Lunch time fitness should focus on F.U.N. – Fitness, Unwinding (relaxing in the middle of the work day) and Natural (e.g. relaxed, easy swimming rather than hard intervals) – try to make your lunch time training a non stressful, enjoyable, relatively unstructured activity.

3:00 PM – Snack time. A nice tub of low fat fruit yoghurt. Why not add a handful of fresh strawberries? Or a few slices of banana?

Another good afternoon snack is breakfast cereal!! Try a bowl of a healthy nutritious cereal topped with fresh fruit and a tub of low fat yoghurt!

5:00 PM – Now.....the big decision: to eat before or after training. Most Masters programs start in the early evening after the peak training times for squad swimmers. This leaves the Masters swimmer with a choice – to eat before training or leave it to after training.

The dilemma is this:

- If you eat before training, it needs to be light and healthy so you don't feel weighted down in the water. Also you need to consider the rest of the family. It is difficult to prepare a meal for them and another meal for yourself.
- If you eat after training – which usually means eating around 9-10 pm – you often feel tired and flat and you can't be bothered preparing a healthy meal. This is why Fast Food joints near Master's swimming programs do so well!!

The answer is BOTH! Have a light snack before training and another (that you prepared earlier in the day) after training.

For example:

If the family is having salad and pasta for dinner, eat the salad and some bread with them before training, then eat the pasta when you get home after training.

If the family is having meat or fish or chicken and vegetables for dinner, eat the vegetables with the family, then reheat the meat, chicken or fish and have it with a small salad after training.

In three words, balancing life and swimming for a Masters swimmer is about
PLANNING – PLANNING – PLANNING.