

Groove to the Music to Improve Swim Performance

Peter Reaburn PhD

Introduction

Existing research using dry land exercise-related activities such as running and indoor rowing has shown that the **use of music in training and racing can lead to a range of benefits** that include enhanced feelings, lower perceived exertion, greater energy efficiency, and **faster time trial performances**. The purpose of this British study was to assess the psychological, psychophysical, and performance effects of music on **swim performance**.

The Research

Twenty six male and female college club level swimmers (18–23 years) underwent a 3-week period of getting used to a [Speedo Aquabeat MP3 players](#) prior to the actual testing trials. They then did two experimental trials (motivational and non-motivational music chosen by swimmers and their friends at 130 beats per minute) and a no-music control, during which they engaged in a **200-m freestyle swimming time trial** in a heated 25m pool. Following a standard 5-minute warm-up, 200m swim performance, heart rate, rating of perceived exertion (how hard did it feel on a 0-10 scale), level of focus (focused on how body felt, wasn't focused on body sensations, or wished swim would finish), level of motivation (0-10 point scale) were measured during and after each of the three 200m swims held a week apart.

The Results

The club level swimmers **swam significantly faster by approximately 2%** when exposed to either the motivational (2m 53s) or non-motivational music (2m 54s) compared to the no music (2m 57s) condition. Moreover, both the music conditions were associated with **higher levels of motivation** and **less focus on body sensations** than when not listening to music.

So What?

The findings of this study support the belief that the **use of music during high-intensity swim training can have a positive effect on swim performance**. The use of music, regardless of its motivational qualities, also resulted in higher self-reported motivation as well as more dissociative (thinking of things other than the effort) thoughts.

Source: Karageorghis, C. and others (2013). Psychological, psychophysical, and ergogenic effects of music in swimming. Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 14(4): 560-568.