



Fear of Open Water & the Swim Start

I have coached masters' swimmers and triathletes for over twenty years. Over that time, one thing that has not changed is that most "swimmers" do not like to run and most "runners" do not like to swim. I take the most pride in helping runners become better swimmers. Let's face it - when you get tired of running, you can stop and walk. But, when you get tired of swimming, well, you have to keep swimming.

So I thought I would offer a few tips for a nervous swimmer to make it through the swim. First, have a plan "b" for the swim. Inevitably, something is going to happen - you will get your goggles knocked off, you will get your foot grabbed, you will get a mouth full of water, you will get out of breath, the list goes on and on. You are not the first to have these things happen to you. The question is: how will you react to the situation? Your plan "b" should not be to look for the life guard - that might be your plan "c". Your plan "b" should be to breaststroke, backstroke, sidestroke, float on your back or whatever you can do other than panic. Remember, you are allowed to do the freestyle stroke in a triathlon and most people choose the American crawl, but you can use whatever stroke you like.

So now you find yourself at the race site in the wee hours of the morning. You are nervous as a cat. Remember this was your idea, relax and know that you are not alone. Do whatever warm-up you want for the bike or run and then get your transition set up. Head down to the swim start with about thirty minutes before the race start. You will not want to do this, but get in the water swim around a bit. Trust me; you do not want your first stroke to be just after the gun goes off. Take an old towel to the water's edge for warmth if you think you will get out of the water after your warm-up. Now, stage yourself out on the edges and to the back of the crowd at the swim start. You might swim a bit extra, but it is better than getting pushed around at the start. If you are really nervous about the start, then wait 30 seconds or so before you head out. You will lose less time giving up 30 seconds at the start than you will panicking 100 yards into the swim. Where you start can mean the difference between a fun day at the races and a DNF.

So let's get ready for warm weather and the triathlon season. Work on your weaknesses and they will be your strengths before you know it!

Coach Lee
PRTriCoach.com