



# Future Dreams

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There is an absolute treasure trove of stuff out there which can help your performance as a swimmer. There are the basics, and then there are the sophisticated swim aids that may be less common and may cost a few \$\$\$s ... but also can be very useful. This article is aimed at giving you a broad idea of what products are available in the market today to give you a more a complete picture of what may and may not help you in the never-ending quest for success. I hope you find something new and helpful here and keep this information in mind when you go swim shopping!

## Swim Togs

I'm not really going to say much about togs other than to suggest you find a pair with the highest nylon content you can. 80% is a good high amount, ideal for a long life, but they are becoming increasingly hard to find. Togs that are made with Lycraä only have about 20% nylon content, and they generally break down within 3 months of around 3 swims per week. The manufacturers know this problem exists but Lycraä based products offer a wider variety of designs and can achieve a better fit. Even so, I would recommend you still look out for nylon where you can find them. They will last longer and save you money.

## Swim Caps

Swim caps come in 2 main variations - Silicon or normal Rubber.

Caps are really only there to stop the hair getting in your eyes, and perhaps offer a little streamlining if you have a untamed mane. This is especially good for learners who react negatively to that feeling of water dripping back down their faces when breathing. However, don't expect them to keep your hair dry! They might manage it for about 4 lengths and that's it.

Another reason for caps is when swimming in open-water - they can be very "visible" if brightly coloured, and this why most event organisers make you wear one while racing. Also, they can be useful in cold swims. Keeping that head warm will make you instantly feel much better when plunging into early or late-season water starting that race.

## Goggles

Goggle are there to let you see without obscured vision and they keep the chlorinated water away from stinging your eyes. But don't hold your breath about the 'anti-fog' claims that most manufacturers make - the best I have ever managed with anti-fog goggles is about 10 swims before the coating



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stops working. So, don't place too much emphasis on whether goggles are supposed to be anti-fog when choosing a pair. Just make sure they don't leak. The best bet is not to get the insides wet before you put them on – that will make the inside stay clear longer than anything. Spit? Nah – it's an old wives tale!

Once upon a time there was really just one category of goggles – a firm plastic lens with foam rubber around the edges. The only problem with these was that the rigidity of the plastic 'outer' meant that the foam sitting against your eyes was quite uncomfortable unless the plastic moulding was exactly the same shape as your own face. The swimwear companies have solved that issue nowadays though, with soft rubber compounds that mold nicely into your face.

I get a lot of swimmers asking me "what are the best type of goggles?" The simple answer is that there is no one best pair of goggles - everyone has differently shaped faces. But there is one type of goggle that does fit most swimmers. And it is interesting that three different companies – TYR, Speedo and Zoggs – all have separate patents on what I swear looks to be the exact same product. If you have seen the TYR Technoflex (see the goggle in the photo in the right margin), you will know the type of goggle I mean. It is a very good product too, fitting 90% of swimmers without any problems. There are more and more products on the market all the time and some up them retail up to US\$50 (like the SealMask). More expensive eyewear for the pool does not necessarily function better, although it can suit different people's needs better. You can buy tinted, coloured, big or small goggles now, and the variation seems never ending. A pair with dark lenses can be helpful on sunny days in open water but, generally, clear goggles are my preference for the pool.

### Fins

This swimming aid is a fantastic tool for beginners and swimming experts alike. Fins give you 'control' and this usually allows swimmers with poor kicking ability to learn complicated arm and rotational body movements faster. However, don't allow yourself to use them "all" the time. You have to learn without them at some point to be a rounded swimmer.

Another seldom talked about benefit of fins is that they can increase the 'flow' of water over your hands by increasing your body speed through the water. Your hands are where most of the magic happens in propulsive swimming movements so anything that helps you feel more on that surface of your body will enhance learning (applies to paddles too).

The best fins are short with stiff blades. This is because they are easier to kick at a normal speed and they also force your ankle to bend, instead of the fin bending to create propulsion.

### Kick Boards



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Kickboards must have been the first swimming aid ever devised. I simply can't remember a time where they haven't been part of a pool environment. As you can see from the photo, kickboards have evolved quite a bit from the slightly rounded square hunk of polystyrene that we, as 5 year olds, learned to kick on in the 70s. Handy for all sorts of kick related exercises, they can also double as pullbuoys when needed.

### Paddles

Look for paddles that are flat and only slightly bigger than your closed hand. Paddles of this size and shape are easy to use, and you will learn skills quickly. As you get better at swimming with them, take the wrist band off as well. This enhances your skill level at controlling the paddle (and therefore hand angles) in any skill set.

I personally recommend the TYR Catalyst – they are flat, and they have been designed in such a shape that they help keep your elbow up on the catch phase of your stroke. This means you have to use less muscular strength staying in the correct technique when pulling. It also avoids over exerting those small rotators that swimmers so often have problems with.

Do not go overboard with the size of your paddles. If you get carried away with large paddles that are really too big for you, you may slow your stroke-rate down too much and go slower or, even worse, develop injuries from the abnormal load on your shoulder muscles.

The general trend worldwide now seems to be towards smaller paddles sizes, even towards "finger paddles" which can help to increase a swimmer feeling of holding the water. But, to be honest, most of it is just hype. Just wearing paddles will not in itself make you a better swimmer. You need guidance and an understanding of what you should be doing with them.

### Pullbuoy

Pullbuoys are used to keep your hips afloat whilst isolating the arms (arm movements without kicking). When your hips drop, they cause drag and that slows you down. Pullbuoys are there to help you develop an awareness of moving forwards solely on the power and skill of what your arms do, ie without the aid of any kick. Many male swimmers are actually faster wearing them to the point where they find it hard to give them up (pullbuoy addiction is not good! It means you avoid learning to kick properly). Wetsuit  
By now I guess we all know a fair bit about wetsuits.

The overview with wetsuits is that if you are a good swimmer, then get the wetsuit that has the most shoulder flexibility. If you are a weaker swimmer then get whatever offers the most buoyancy. Forget the rest, it's all marketing (I used to manage one of the larger wetsuit companies so I know what they are trying to get you to believe!).

### Swim Cords



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Swim cords are about the best way of gaining specific swim strength (apart from the Vasa Trainer below). Cords can focus on almost any part of your swim stroke. But the most relevant part of the stroke they should be used for is the high elbow catch that an accomplished freestyler will always display.

The main reason why I like to use swim cords, however, is a highly ambiguous concept in swimmers minds, which often defies complete description by coaches worldwide. It is the "feel" of solid water. When you press on to a set of paddles that are connected to an elastic cord, you will develop almost the same kinaesthetic feel as water being held on your palm whilst swimming. So make doubly sure that when you use swim cords, they have a set of flat swim paddles in their construction and not just a round grip like on a weight in the gym.

#### Vasa Trainer

Like swim cords, this is a very useful (albeit expensive) way of developing the all-important high swimmer's elbow on the catch phase of the stroke. The biggest benefit of this over anything else is that you get mentally and neurally used to pressing on a point that doesn't move. Remember, it is YOU that moves forward not your hands that move back (one of the big misunderstandings of swimming).

#### Aquapacer – Solo

An Aquapacer Soloä is a small device that attaches to your goggle strap and emits a low but audible beep while swimming. The device can be programmed to beep at different rates, which the swimmer can then match with his or her arm stroke speed. This can be useful for learning how to swim at different stroke rates and when combined with certain stroke lengths you have quite a powerful learning & training tool.

#### Endless Pools

For those of you who want the ultimate in yuppie training accessories, an Endless Pool is for you. Like having a Flume in your own backyard, you can set the jet-speed and then go for it without having to mix with the proletariat down at the local swimming centre. While it's a definite option as a time saving device, I can't really imagine anyone learning to "enjoy" training in one – I'd personally get too bored.

#### Swim Bags

TYR have a mesh bag that all your wet swimming gear can be thrown in after workouts and come out dry the next day. It's a useful product to help you care for the rest of your investment.

#### In Closing

Remember that, at the end of the day, simply having the flash gear will not mean a damn thing unless you get out there and train. So, even if your only reason for getting all the cool stuff is that it gets you out there training, then



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that's good enough. Motivation can be hard to come by, so suck it up where ever you can find it.

And by the way, it IS important to look good no matter what you're doing!

Enjoy,  
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