



Without Water Warm-Ups

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At many age group swim meets, warm up and swim down facilities are less than ideal. There may be very limited opportunities for water based Warm ups and swim downs may be practically impossible.

The process of preparation for competition, can be seen to be a series of connected activities to take an athlete from the relatively comfortable state of rest to a state of readiness to perform a specific competition task.

Whilst the actual activities will be specific to the sport and even to the individual athlete, there is a logical sequence of related activities to consider when thinking about an effective warm up routine:

1. Some form of general aerobic warm up consisting of light, easy, rhythmic exercise to warm the body, increase blood flow to peripheral muscles, elevate heart rate and stimulate the athlete to thinking about the task at hand.
2. A light general stretching routine working large muscles groups.
3. A more specific warm up activity, ie. one which more closely resembles the actual race performance. This may involve an increased NEURAL component, eg. skills, drills.
4. A more specific stretching routine targeting muscles groups involved in the actual race performance, ie. working through an increased range of motion.
5. An activity which very closely simulates the actual race
6. Some form of light general easy exercise prior to the actual race performance.

Why warm up?

From a scientific standpoint we know that warm up:

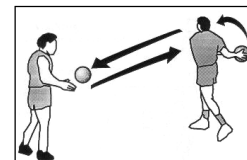
- Increases body temperature - Increases heart rate - Increases blood pressure - Increases energy producing enzyme activity

As coaches we observe that warm up:

- Increases confidence by giving swimmers a feel for the pool, the water temperature, wall, flags, blocks and general conditions, (increases familiarity with the race conditions).
- Increases race readiness through the opportunity to rehearse specific pacing and stroking strategies.

What **techniques** can you use **to warm up swimmers when there is no or limited water for warming up ?**

1. Running – light jogging and relaxed easy paced running
2. Skipping rope – light easy skipping, with some vigorous skipping thrown in at intervals
3. Stretch cords – smooth easy and rhythmic to start with then hold race rhythm and rating as intervals.
4. Basketball/football / tennis ball –team games, throwing. **Must** be CONTROLLED!
5. Showers and stretch
6. Spa and stretch
7. Stretching
8. Jumps starts
9. Medicine ball routines / Swiss Ball ("physio ball" routines)
10. Circuits
11. Breathing and Yoga style relaxation exercises



Be prepared for anything. Take all the gear to the meet that you may need to do a WWW if you have to. **Don't make the mistake of assuming that there will be warm up and swim down facilities even at the biggest swimming complex.** Try to know in advance the type of warm up and swim down facilities that will be available at the meet.

Practice your www in training in the lead up to the meet the same way you practice your pool warm up. For example, practice your full pool warm up in the morning sessions of the second last week before the meet and your WWW before the afternoon sessions. In the last week before the meet, reverse it (WWW in the mornings, pool warm up in the afternoon).

It is extremely important that WWW's are practiced in the lead up to the meet. For example, asking swimmers to jog for a warm up when they have done little or no running in the lead up to the meet is asking for problems. Tired legs and sore muscles in legs unused to regular running are not consistent with fast swimming.

Another alternative when water space is limited is combining water warm ups with www. For example: 20 minutes easy swimming—15 minutes medicine ball—10 minutes stretch cords—5-minute walk and gentle stretch.

The less time available for water based warm ups, the swimmer needs to have a range of physical and mental techniques to prepare their body for competition. The less time and space available for water based warm ups and physical activity , the more time available for mental "warm-up". It is imperative that all swimmers incorporate mental skills training in their swimming training program. **Do not over-expose the athletes to the sun during their WWW as it can increase feelings of lethargy and sluggishness, athletes can get sunburnt and there is the danger of dehydration.**

Boredom can be a real de-motivator and can un-do the effects of the best warm up. Aim to keep athletes physically and mentally alert and stimulated. Try playing games like picking the winner, second and third of each race. Predict times of all placegetters. In addition boredom can lead to overeating as swimmers look for any distractions to pass the time between races.

www kit:

There are a few items that might be handy to have around in case you have to take the team through a www. These include:

Running shoes (each swimmer should have their own at every meet); **Extra towel** (to lay on during circuit exercise and stretching routines); **Cushioned exercise mats**; **Exercise bike or home trainer**; **warm clothes** (tracksuit, extra t-shirt, wet weather gear in case the team has to warm up outside in bad weather); **Stretch cords**; **Skipping ropes**; **Basketball/football /tennis balls** (must be controlled activity due to injury risks); **Massage Oil**; **Board Games / Cards / Mind games / Executive Puzzles**; **Ice and Plastic Bags** (to make ice packs) for quick treatment of injuries and for cooling in hot weather

Other WWW ideas:

1. Walk the race distance along the side of the pool in exactly race time and with race splits visualizing the race as you walk.
2. Assume your dive position somewhere out of the way where you can hear the starters instructions and the gun (behind the stands is always good). Take your mark on the starters instructions and at the sound of the gun, drive with your legs and arms and explode jump forward.
3. Take a long warm shower and stretch while you are really warm. Remember to take a drink bottle into the showers to keep hydrated!
4. Find the best position in the pool environment and set up camp there. Somewhere quiet, cool, out of the way of spectators, yet somewhere where you can easily hear the marshalling instructions.
5. Find another pool somewhere near the competition pool. If your event is one hour or two after the official warm up, head off to the nearby pool, do a race warm up, dress warmly and arrive back to the competition pool in time for your event.

WWWD's -Without Water Warm Downs

Following a competition or race, the athlete and / or team should complete a period of "cool down" or "warm down": a series of light exercises and stretches, progressively decreasing in intensity and complexity towards rest.

This allows for the gradual " de-stimulation" of the individual, aids in the removal of metabolic waste products and accumulated lactate, and perhaps most importantly allows the coach and athlete to evaluate and discuss the race.

It is an ideal time to commence the recovery process by ensuring the athlete eats and drinks something.

This is particularly important if the athlete needs to recover quickly to compete in further races in the same session or for finals to come later that day. Ideally, the swimmer will complete a controlled, pre-rehearsed and practiced swim down routine in a designated swim down pool. This is not always possible !

Hydrotherapy alternatives

Recent research at the AIS has indicated that using "hydrotherapies" is a great way to warm down when the pool is not available. One possible alternative is to use alternating hot and cold showers. Experiment with the best method for your individual swimmers.

One possible protocol is: 3 x (3 minutes hot shower / 1 minute cold shower)

The idea is that the hot water dilates (opens up) blood vessels in working muscles and the cold water constricts (closes) them. The open-close action causes metabolic waste products like lactic acid to be "flushed" from the muscles and broken down elsewhere in the body.

Part of successful swimming is to use the warm up to prepare the athlete's mind to be ready for the first 20-30 meters of racing. The explosion of the blocks and swimming a fast, controlled first 20-30 meters is as much about mental preparation as it is physical.

Above all, do **not** do anything in competition warm ups, in the pool or on dry land, that you have not practiced during training.

WWW's are also a great morale booster for a team. Where possible, teams should do WWW's in club gear, together and as a unified force. This also has the effect of intimidating the opposition, building team morale and attracting publicity .



The range and variety of WWW' s are only limited by your imagination.

Be prepared for anything, expect the unexpected and prepare for the worst conditions imaginable.

Spending months preparing for a big meet, only to have a poor result because pool warm up facilities were not available and the team hadn't practiced dry land alternatives is not an acceptable outcome for the professional coach and successful athlete.