

4 STEPS TO STAYING MOTIVATED

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Did you make a New Year's resolution this year? If so, have you stuck with it so far? Studies indicate that if you only made it to the end of January you were in good company – the majority of people abandon their resolutions somewhere between mid January and mid February. Whether it's a New Year resolution or a commitment you make to yourself at some other time of year, what can you do to make it more likely you will see it through?

SET A SPECIFIC GOAL

You need a goal that answers the question 'How good, by when?', and it must be specific. For example, instead of 'I want to swim 1000m continuously', it may be 'By July 2022 I'm going to swim 1000m continuously in the pool, at effort level 5 out of 10 with an average 22 strokes per length'. Or, not just 'This year I'm going to swim more freestyle outdoors instead of breaststroke', but 'By May 2022 I will immerse my face within 2 minutes of stepping into the sea, and then swim freestyle for at least 10 minutes'.

COME UP WITH SOME CHANGE IDEAS

Once you have established your goal, you can identify some factors that will influence the achievement of the goal, then use those as a starting point to generate ideas for making changes. Prioritise the ideas you'll try out first based on the evidence of what is likely to work best, as well as some quick wins.



Elsewhere we have provided some change ideas for elements of stroke technique, and how best to practise. Here we focus on action designed specifically to help your motivation.

MINDSET

Imagine you want to do something different with your phone or another device; sometimes it isn't possible to attach new hardware or download a particular app unless we get a whole new operating system. Similarly, it may be that no matter how hard you try to change behaviours or actions, you won't make the progress you're aiming for until you change your mindset.

For example, while your goal may require you to make changes to stroke technique, at the same time you may be committed to always swimming at your highest effort level. But swimming at that effort level draws on well-established neurological pathways, whereas focussing on the new movement pattern requires a focus on new sensations to build and strengthen new neurological pathways. Your change goal and existing commitments may seem to be pushing you in opposite directions, so you feel stuck.

What are the assumptions underlying your existing commitments? In this example, assumptions may include 'If I swim at a lower effort level, my times will get slower', 'Swimming at less than full effort is a waste of time', 'If I don't breathe in and out hard, I won't get enough oxygen', 'Other people notice what I'm doing in the pool, and if I swim with less effort they'll think I'm useless'. Once you've identified your assumptions you can take action to learn whether or not they are true. If your assumptions aren't as true as you think, then you don't need to continue doing the things you do now that prevent you achieving your goal.

SUPPORT

What support from others do you already have, and what do you need to help you to achieve your goal? How could friends and family who don't swim support you differently, for example organising your time with them so you don't have to choose between swimming and social time, and still get the chores done? What are acceptable trade-offs for each of you? If you prefer group to individual activities, how could you find local open water swimming groups (coached or uncoached), or a swim buddy to join you in open water or the pool? If you prefer to swim on your own but have concerns about safety, what opportunities are there in your area to swim in supervised settings?

A good coach will accelerate your progress towards your goal by helping you prioritise the changes that you make to your movement patterns, and by guiding you to practise in the most effective ways. If you think you don't have time, or you are too far from a coach, virtual coaching may be easier to fit in to your busy schedule. Next time we'll explore some of the benefits of virtual coaching, and what to look for when choosing the right coach for you.

MEASURE

Did you notice that all the examples of specific goals above included something you can measure? It's essential that you have measures for your overall goal as well as for the processes that you change to drive that goal. Otherwise, how can you know that the changes you are making are driving you towards achieving your goal?

Some measures may seem more straightforward, for example time, distance or strokes per length. However, if the changes you make are qualities you can always make them numerical. For example, if you are working on your arm recovery, you will only make the neurological changes needed with consistent focus on the specifics of this movement pattern; you could start by giving yourself a score out of 10 per length for attention to detail (make a note immediately in your waterproof notebook). Once you are consistently achieving a high score for that, move on to giving yourself a score out of 10 for precision of the movement.

When you analyse your data you need to make the best decisions about next steps – for example to continue with a change, adjust it, or abandon it. In a future article we'll look at how to do this by telling a story with your data.

CELEBRATE SUCCESS – FREQUENTLY

How do you usually celebrate? Does it have to involve cake, or wine? What other rewards would be motivating for you, as you make changes? For example, you might create a points system for achieving success with individual changes, that adds up to a real treat over time. Will it mean more if you have a support team to share the success with?

If you want something to celebrate about your swimming in 2022, now is the time to set a specific goal, identify potential changes that will drive your achievement, and start to collect useful data.

EXPERT ADVICE

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