

Warming Down



BY KELSEY SAVAGE HAYS with Kristin Hill, Head Coach of Boise State Swimming

Warm down gives hard-worked muscles the chance to prepare for the next practice or race. Swimmers should aim to get their heart rate under 100 beats per minute before exiting the warm-down pool. While a 200-300 yard set with some drills and easy swimming is usually enough recovery after practice, races require a little extra strategy. Here are five tips for getting the most out of warm down:

1. After a race, warming down should be the immediate focus. A long wait between competition and recovery gives the body more time to tighten, making it harder to flush out the lactate acid built up in muscles.
2. Start with a relaxed 300 yards before doing a short interval set; Kristin suggests doing 6x50 yards on :45 seconds. The slight increase of intensity hastens the removal of lactate acid by increasing blood circulation. Finish with some more easy swimming, or, if there isn't much time between races, start preparing for the next event with drills and pace work.
3. Hydrate with water between events or with a recovery drink if it's the final warm-down of the session. Fluids, especially those including carbohydrates and protein, can greatly aid recovery, but stick to drinking something you've already tested during practice. Keep your choice beverage on the side of the pool and sip it during your warm down.
4. Most swimmers need 600-800 yards before their heart rate settles, but some might need longer. Don't shortchange your body with too little recovery; leave the warm-down pool fresh for the next race.
5. Stretching after warming down can also loosen the body, if it's already part of your routine. Don't push yourself into stretching in ways you aren't used to. Stretching not only helps the muscles relax, but it gives a swimmer a few quiet minutes to prepare for the next race.