



ALL ABOUT MOTIVATION

Helen Davis looks at how to use motivation to maximise your swim performance

WHY DO YOU DO IT?

Why do you go open water swimming? It's a question I am sure many people ask you and, being a fan of open water swimming, one that you can probably answer quite easily. Motivations for open water swimming can vary widely: a love of open space, being at one with nature, it's a physical and mental challenge, you want to expand your social circle or it gives you a sense of personal achievement... the list goes on; there are just far too many reasons to mention! Whether you are an elite swimmer or someone just looking to maintain a New Year's resolution in open water swimming, motivation is complex and extremely unique to every individual. For many people motivation in sport can fluctuate, despite it being an essential part of sports performance. So how can you make sure that you maximise the benefits of motivation on your open water swimming? By understanding exactly how it all works!

WHAT IS MOTIVATION?

Motivation is the direction and intensity of your effort towards something that you want to do. Some days we have lots of it, other days not so much. In sport, motivation is the foundation of athletic effort and accomplishment. Without your desire and determination to improve your sports performances, all of the other mental factors, such as confidence, intensity, focus and emotions, are

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← meaningless. To become the best athlete you can be, you must be motivated to do what it takes to maximise your ability and achieve your goals. Motivation can impact everything that influences your sport performance: physical conditioning, technical and tactical training, mental preparation, and general lifestyle including sleep, diet, school or work, and relationships.

WHY DO WE WANT MOTIVATION?

Motivation is an internal energy that can determine aspects of our behaviour: it impacts on how we think, feel and interact with others. Motivation will help you with all aspects of your open water swimming, so become an expert in the what drives you and maximise the quality of your motivation.

WHAT CAN HELP WITH THIS?

One of the most popular and widely tested approaches to motivation in sport is Self-Determination Theory (SDT). SDT does a really good job at helping us to understand and maximise our motivation and keep working with it. It is powerful in helping people feel in control of motivation and gives you a formula to follow. It says that when people are at their most motivated there are three key ingredients at play: competence, relatedness and autonomy.

WHAT TYPES OF MOTIVATION ARE THERE?

According to SDT, there are three main types of motivation: extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation and amotivation.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Having lots of intrinsic motivation means you do something because you genuinely enjoy it and it is fun for you. If you are intrinsically motivated you are motivated by something inside you because it is naturally satisfying to you. Consider for a moment your motivation for reading this article. If you are reading it because you have an interest in psychology and simply want to know more about the topic of motivation then you are showing intrinsic motivation to

THREE KEY INGREDIENTS

Competence

The first one is competence. Competence is a state where you feel like you are getting good feedback and are in control of your open water swimming – things are going well for you – you might feel like you have mastered your swimming in some way. Feelings of high competence will drive your engine to motivate you more.

Examples of competence in open water swimming:

- Your coach praised your technique in training
- You completed the set when you knew it might be hard
- Another swimmer commented on your ability in the lake
- You are feeling good about your ability in open water swimming

Relatedness

Relatedness refers to feelings you have that make you feel connected to others or your open water swimming community. Relatedness means you have a sense of belonging to a group and experience caring for others. These feelings of being part of something will make you feel more motivated.

Examples of relatedness in open water swimming:

- You enjoy meeting and going swimming with other swimmers in a group or club
- You go to an open water session to meet with friends and training partners
- You are helped by others around you

Autonomy

Autonomy is having a sense of freedom and choice over what you do. Autonomy is high when you feel you are engaging in swimming because you are choosing to do so, not because you feel pressured by other people or external factors. If you experience feelings of autonomy, you will be more motivated as a result.

Examples of autonomy in open water swimming:

- You enjoy swimming because you enjoy the experience
- You like choosing how and what you do in swimming
- You are clear about what open water swimming means to you

CHECK YOUR MOTIVATION

In order to evaluate your own motivation, check in with these three key ingredients now and ask yourself the following questions:

Look at the three key ingredients and ask yourself which is the most important one for you. Think when you have been particularly motivated in the past – which one of these key ingredients helped you the most? Motivation is very individual, so it is a good idea to check in with your motivations every once in a while, and know which ingredient is the most significant one for you. It is important to remember when these three key ingredients are supported and satisfied within a social context, generally people experience more vitality, self-motivation and well-being. Conversely, the thwarting or frustration of these key ingredients will lead to diminished self-motivation and greater ill-being. Lots of research supports this with athletes in sport, so use this knowledge to help yourself.

Do I have a sense of these three key ingredients for motivation?

Do I feel part of group?

Do I have a sense of belonging?

How confident do I feel doing what I am doing?

How in control do I feel?

read it. If, however, you are reading it because someone has told you to read it, you are acting based on extrinsic motivation, another type of motivation.

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

With extrinsic motivation, a person tends to do a task or activity mainly because doing so will yield some kind of reward or benefit upon completion. If you are extrinsically motivated, your motivation is driven by external rewards such as money, fame, medals or praise for example. This type of motivation arises from outside of the individual and means that sometimes you are motivated to avoid an adverse outcome.

AMOTIVATION

Amotivation is a third type of motivation and is described as a lack of motivation. This is where individuals simply go through the motions to accomplish a behaviour or activity – this results from not placing value on an activity, not feeling competent in the activity or holding low expectations for the activity.

AM I MOTIVATED ENOUGH?

Learning about motivation and what motivates you is the first step in being able to answer the question; am I motivated enough? We know from research that people's motivation is at its best when it is self-determined. So, if you are concerned about your motivation, start by looking at the three key ingredients and place your focus there.

FINALLY...

Taking some time to learn about what motivates you is a great way of helping yourself in the future. Rather than questioning, 'am I motivated enough?', place your focus on exploring your own motivation personality; enjoy having more influence over it! It is important to accept the natural ups and downs of motivation, learn to get more confident about understanding what motivations you have and keep seeking to learn about your motivation. Realising your own intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and balancing them can be quite rewarding.

NEXT MONTH'S ISSUE: SETTING GOALS

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THEY FOR OPEN WATER SWIMMING?

WHAT CAN I DO?

Ask yourself questions about the three key ingredients

- Am I creating an environment where I feel in control, feel supported and am checking in with people?
- Am I doing the right things to keep the quality of my motivation in the best health possible?
- Am I taking responsibility for my own motivation?

Remember the reality of motivation

- Remind yourself that it is normal for motivation to fluctuate
- Remind yourself that it is hard for motivation to be high every single day
- Have acceptance that motivation fluctuates and use your social support network to help you on days where it is difficult to motivate yourself

Regularly work on your confidence (see August issue)

- Remember, if you are lacking in motivation, confidence in your ability can be lost
- Reflect back and use other people to remind yourself of your track record, your successes and why you swim

Regularly think about control (see September issue)

- Actively put your energy and focus into things that you can control – check in with this from time to time. Is my focus on my controllables or am I actually thinking and worrying about factors I can't control?

Find a motivation buddy

- Find a motivation buddy who you regularly check in with to help keep you both motivated

Score yourself on a scale of 0-10

- Rate yourself on the key ingredients on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the highest and 0 the lowest. If your score is low on a particular ingredient – ask yourself how can I move it on? How can I become more connected to others for example? What could I do?

Think of a time

- Think of a time when you lost motivation, which one of the three ingredients got affected first? This tells you which one is the most important to you. If you know it's important to you, keep investing your focus there.



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Helen has a BA (Hons) in Psychology, an MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology and is currently working towards chartered status with the British Psychological Society. Helen is a qualified REBT Primary Practicum practitioner. She is also an active masters and open water swimmer.

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