



## C'mon In, the Water's Not Boring!

Hitting the pool is the one exercise that works almost every muscle group in the body—but it can make a man go insane from boredom. Then Steven Leckart figured out the secret to maximizing the best piece of equipment in the gym

→ Like most guys, once I hit 30, my guyological clock kicked in. Now my body can't keep up like it used to, and I'm almost out of ways to break a sweat. Running? Creaky knees. Weight training? Busted back. Pickup basketball? Glass ankles. Tennis? All of the above.

In search of a cure for my chronically sore back, the worst of my ills, I consulted a sports orthopedist, followed by a chiropractor, and finally an acupuncturist. All three asked whether I'd considered swimming. Honestly, not for a second. I'd

seen the pool at my gym, patronized largely by two types of people: guys who clearly knew what they were doing and extras from *Cocoon*. Never once did I consider jumping in. But now I was out of alternatives.

My first hurdle: the swimsuit. With a skin tone best described as Sasquatch, I'm not the target demographic for a banana hammock. But there's a reason you don't see people doing the backstroke in board shorts—beachworthy swimwear is heavy and creates drag. Thankfully, Speedo

also makes "jammers," the swimsuit equivalent of boxer briefs.

My first day at the pool was mostly spent not drowning. Just breathing without swallowing gallons of water is the biggest challenge for newbie Phelpses, but within a few sessions I'd found my rhythm. Typically, freestyle swimmers breathe every third stroke: left arm, right arm, left arm, breathe left (and vice versa). If you finish your exhale just as your head comes out of the water, you'll inhale more cleanly; the easier you breathe, the easier it is to keep swimming.

Of course, once I stopped choking, I got bored. Some diehards love the meditative side of swimming: the focus on breathing and the black line spanning the length of the pool that keeps you centered in the lane. Not me. A waterproof MP3 player kept me entertained, but the best way to break the monotony was to vary my routine.

Switching things up had the added benefit of targeting different muscle groups.

I didn't just experiment with strokes. For a seemingly minimal sport, you can go nuts with swimming gear—and you should. A kickboard can cook your legs and abs just as efficiently as squats, while a foam pull buoy or hand paddles will up the ante on your torso and arms.

In just a few months, muscles replaced pudge, and my body awareness improved far more than it did after years of off-and-on yoga. Oh, and my back no longer felt like a twisted towel, since swimming strengthens the core and releases the weight on your joints. It even taught me to unwind. The easiest stroke is the most relaxed one, and that feeling of loose muscles—and mind—has seeped over into my life on dry land. The Speedos, however, stay in the gym bag.

## Speedo Not Included: Gear for the Pool



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