

» THE HOT TUB «

Why We Swim

For years, humans have flocked toward Masters Swimming with rational explanations: Health. Exercise. Camaraderie. Blah, blah, blah.

But I know the truth. People join Masters Swimming for reasons more complex than “health,” “fun,” and “because my therapist told me to.” The real reasons involve bacon, beating 25-year-olds on your 50th birthday, and because your therapist told you to.

Here are the real reasons why you took the plunge and joined Masters Swimming:

1. SWIMMING = NOT RUNNING

Simply put: Swimming is not running. You don't have to put on neon green tennis shoes. You don't have to run along 95-degree sidewalks while mosquitos bite you. In swimming, you don't wear ridiculous visors. You don't worry about sweat stinging your eyes because sweat conveniently washes away. You don't limp the Earth like your knees will fall off. You don't feel like you're a mouse running on a treadmill while you just know higher life forms are watching and laughing at you. Swimming is not running. And not running

will keep me swimming for a long time.

2. BEING ABLE TO SAY “I’M A MASTERS SWIMMER”

Becoming a Masters swimmer is one annual price to pay now, which soon becomes priceless when you announce to co-workers, “Sorry, I have to go to my Masters practice.” Draw out the word: “Maaaaa-stterrrr...” Wait until co-workers stop staring (from dumbstruck awe) to ask you what, exactly, that means. Don't bother explaining. Nod, then take off for your Masters practice, powerfully and with authority. After all, if they're not in Masters, they're not masters. Just make sure, after the authoritative exit, to confirm that you packed your tiny Spandex swimsuit.

3. EATING LIKE IT'S 1999

Joining a Masters team means you've punched a lifetime pass to post-practice buffet excursions. Don't listen to “doctors” who point to “studies” about “nutrition.” After 400 IMs or 100 butterfly repeat sets, you can carry bacon and dough-

nuts in your swim bag. There's no more satisfying feeling that watching as your co-worker eats fat-free yogurt as you throw a slab of bacon on your desk and proceed to wrap a few more slices of bacon around that bacon. You swam butterfly this morning. You've earned it.

4. BEATING YOUNGER PEOPLE

Ask Masters swimmers why they swim, and they'll give you standard lines. “Because it's fun” or “It's a great way to meet friends.” Don't be fooled. These are party lines shared by the Masters Swimming Propagandists. What it's really about? Deep down, near the cockles of your heart, you want to beat that 28-year-old with the 40-inch biceps and eight-pack abs. You want that dude to eat your butterfly wake as you pass him like a typhoon. Your eight-pack left years ago. It got lost somewhere between your 30s and your fourth kid. Whose fault is that? The 28-year-old's—that guy who's checking his reflection in the

pool's surface. Go get him.

5. UNDERSTANDING OTHER SWIMMERS

Just as there's no place like home, there are no friends like Swim Friends. Slogging through 200 freestyle repeats while immersed in freezing water creates community. It's belonging to a kind of tribe—one that embraces 5 a.m. alarm clock rings, never-ending butterfly sets, chlorine, bloodshot eyes, and that feeling of swallowing a floating strand of someone else's hair. Swim Friends get along, no matter age or background (unless you're 28 and have an eight-pack). Find a passionate water-person, and you've found a friend for life. Someone who understands you, and someone who understands what you go through—literally, other people's hair and dirt, because many swimmers don't properly shower before practice. We're friends because we embrace each other, stroke by stroke, hairball by hairball. And that's true friendship.—

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