

Point your feet in the direction of the pool

Dave Tanner

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IU research associate Dave Tanner, shortly after setting a world record during a United States Masters Swimming competition several years ago.



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It's a sad fact that 50 percent of those who begin an exercise program will drop out within six months. Why? There can be many reasons, but they all boil down to fun. We tend to repeat activities we enjoy and avoid ones we dislike. If we enjoy swimming, we will find a way to do it.

- **Make it a social encounter:** Find a group of people with similar goals and set up a schedule of regular swim workouts. Better yet, join a swim club or sign up for a swim class. Making new friends in the pool will keep you in it.
- **Don't make it harder than it needs to be:** If you must swim alone, go for convenience. Select a pool close to home or work that has convenient hours. Good air and water quality and temperature contribute to a comfortable pool environment.
- **Set definite and reasonable goals:** Your goal might be to cover a specific distance or to enter a competition. Make the commitment to achieve the goal, then design a schedule that forces you into a daily routine that you can maintain. Start slowly so as not to fry yourself the first week. Be patient. It may take weeks to see progress. There are many ways to monitor your progress, the most obvious of which is consistency. Can you keep to your schedule? If so, you will be making progress towards maintaining fitness. Thereafter you can measure your progress by swimming farther during each workout or by completing a fixed distance in a shorter time. You can do this by either swimming faster or by taking less rest, both indicators that your fitness is improving.
- **Technique:** Since we tend to enjoy activities we do well, make an extra effort initially to improve your technique. This may require the services of a qualified coach or instructor.

Once you establish a routine, stick to it. Even on days you don't feel like working out, at least get in the water for a short, easy swim. You might find that once you are wet you will feel better. If not, take a hot shower and go home! If you consistently find yourself going home, then it's time to consider other forms of exercise. Sprinkle your schedule with running, biking, weights or other activities you enjoy. Go to the pool only when you really feel like it. If your goal is an active, healthy lifestyle, the end result will be the same as if you'd done all your exercise in the water.

