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MASTERS SWIMMERS

WHAT MASTERS SWIMMERS
NEED TO KNOW ABOUT PROTEIN

RESET YOUR COMPETITION
GEARS IN 2021

SWIMMER

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2021 USMS.ORG



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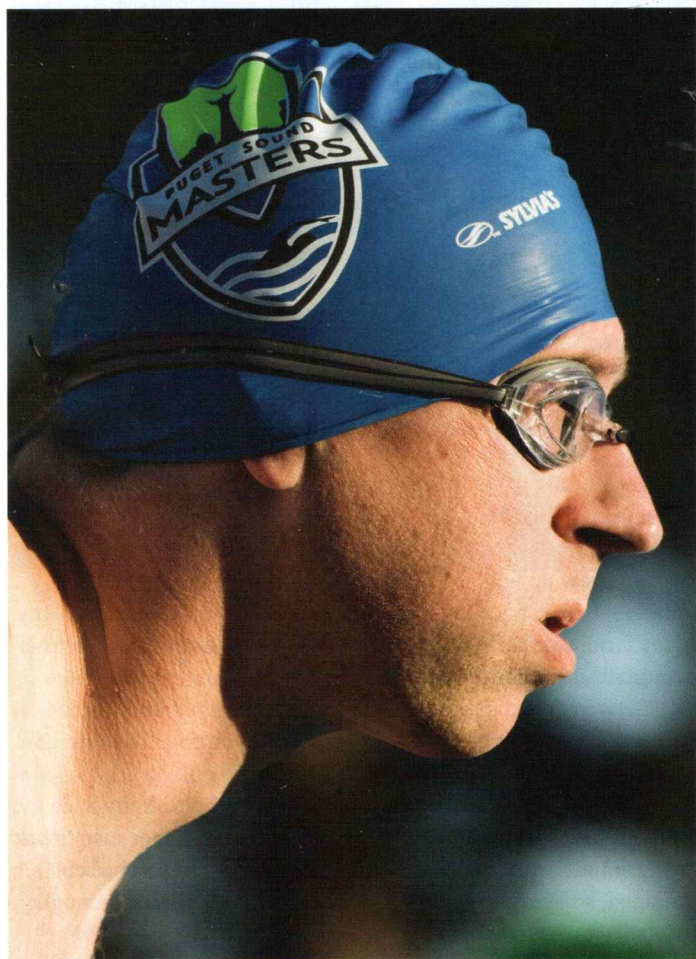
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PSYCH SHEET

The Way of Thinking That Could Change Your Swimming This Year

Tap into a growth mindset to swim even stronger—and have more fun in the water



So you're sure that you're a terrible kicker and that's just never going to change. Or you're certain that some people are born with a feel for the water and you're not one of them, so you're never really going to get it.

Stanford University psychology professor and author Carol Dweck isn't so sure.

In years of research on how students learn, she noticed that they tended to fall into one of two mindsets: They'd think either that the ability they were born with doesn't really change much or that their abilities can be developed and changed. She called the former a "fixed" mindset and the latter a "growth" one, and wrote the blockbuster book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success" about the theory she saw borne out over and over again.

What she also discovered is that neither mindset is right or wrong, but Dweck—and plenty of teachers and coaches—noticed that over

time, people with great abilities and a fixed mindset get outperformed by people who apply a growth mindset to what they're looking to do.

Fixed mindsets often force talented athletes to become so concerned about looking talented that they don't actually further that talent. Think of the student who would rather ace an easy class than learn something from a harder one or the swimmers who won't test themselves against the best racers because they might lose.

But the growth mindset—one in which you embrace challenges, learn from criticism, and keep testing new options—allows you to sink your teeth into learning and, as a result, actually grow and learn. It also helps you persist through setbacks. And Dweck noticed that people employing this mindset tended to perform better and keep up their motivation. The growth mindset, coaches and teachers have come to understand, can be trained. Here's how to develop it.

Turn everything into an experiment. Sorry, Yoda, but it turns out that in great performance, there is a “try.” In a growth mindset, you think of your whole swimming endeavor as a learning process and test different options, says Howard Schein, a coach who collaborated with Dweck on a paper on using the growth mindset in swimming that was published in 2010 in *The NISCA Journal*, which is produced by the National Interscholastic Swimming Coaches Association.

“You have to be willing to try something that won’t work—or that might work,” says Schein, an Illinois Masters member.

When you consider things an experiment, “a do-over is possible,” says Kenneth Rippetoe, a Level 3 coach and member of One With the Water in Southern California. When people with a growth mindset don’t hit the nail on the head—suppose they’re aiming for 11 strokes per length in butterfly and do 13—they say, “What did I learn from that, and how can I make it better?” he says.

Just be a little careful about that “try.” Growth-minded athletes tend to work hard to improve, but this can lead them to think that effort is progress. In a paper Dweck wrote in *Education Week* in 2015, eight years after her book launched, she clarified that a growth mindset isn’t only about “Great effort! You tried your best.” It’s about learning from what you tried.

For instance, if you tried speeding up the first part of your 200 freestyle to see if you could hold on at the end and you fell apart, don’t stop with “Well, I tried.” A growth mindset is about analyzing what didn’t work out so well and what you might need to do next to improve the back half of that event.

Remember that everything is data. When something doesn’t work, “it’s just a data point,” says John Fitzpatrick, a Level 2 coach and member of Illinois Masters. “It’s not a value judgment.” See if you can think of the result of your experiment as good information on something that you need to redo. It’s not failure; it’s an opportunity to try something else and improve. Rippetoe agrees and recommends asking yourself, “Can you have a different outcome next time, if you change something now?”

A corollary to not looking at something as failure is avoiding the “good job” trap, Rippetoe says. The trouble with saying to yourself that you did a good job is that everything that’s not a good job becomes a bad job. Instead of putting a value judgment on your work, he says, “I often say to swimmers, ‘Hey, you did it! I like the way you used your kick on that set. Now can you do it again? What would happen if you tried it a little faster?’” The “you did it” doesn’t set up the good/bad polarity, and the “what would happen” question engages curiosity and playfulness.

Learn the power of the word “yet.” If you find a fixed mindset grabbing hold of you, tag the word “yet” onto your thought, recommends Mike Porteus, a triathlon coach in the U.K. As in, “I’m not a good kicker yet” or “I haven’t mastered the feel of the water yet.” That little word can help change your beliefs, which can help change your swimming and your experiences at practice.

MARTY MUNSON
COLUMNIST



TUNE-UP

Why You Should Use a Snorkel

A snorkel can help fix your freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly technique

I didn’t use a snorkel during the first 30 years of my swimming career, even though using one had become popular among my teammates during college and during my professional swimming life. I just didn’t see the benefits of using one.

Things changed when I suffered a minor shoulder injury in 2009 and spent two weeks doing nothing but kick sets. I never liked using a kickboard because it doesn’t support good body position, so I was looking for ways to make kicking more comfortable. A teammate suggested using a snorkel, and my life was changed in a matter of minutes.

During those two weeks, the snorkel allowed me to concentrate on my body position in the water while keeping my injured shoulder out of the equation. I developed a better understanding of the importance of body position and slightly improved my kicking.

Once I was able to swim again, I swam freestyle with a snorkel. By eliminating the act of turning to breathe, I was able to concentrate more on the mechanics of my stroke, including the issue that might have caused my shoulder injury.

I now use a snorkel in two of my five workouts each week. A snorkel can help you recognize and improve stroke deficiencies in freestyle, breaststroke, and butterfly, and is great if you’re doing sculling drills.

In freestyle, a snorkel will tell you if you’re rotating your body during nonbreathing strokes or staying flat on your stomach. Rotating your body while swimming with a snorkel will be difficult if you try to move your head as well.

I rarely do a full stroke of breaststroke with a snorkel. Instead, I do a lot of pulling with a flutter kick, which helps me understand how I’m using my arm pull. If you find yourself bobbing up and down on your stroke while wearing a snorkel, you’re not working to move forward. Adjust your pull to keep your body moving forward, with very little vertical movement.

Butterfly can be tough to do with a snorkel, but it’s possible. It fixes the tendency to dive too deep on the arm entry and keeps your undulation intact. If you use your head to guide your undulation, you’ll get a snorkel full of water.



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LEVEL 2 COACH

