

Mighty Mac Swim

Sample Training Schedule & FAQs

By Jim Dreyer - www.JimTheSharkDreyer.com

One size does not fit all when it comes to training regimens. It is always best to experiment a little and go with a training schedule that your body responds the best to. Remember, training is 1/3 of the equation. Proper nutrition and getting your required sleep are the other important components of optimum health and performance (along with clean living, of course). Following is a sample training schedule to prepare for the *Mighty Mac Swim*. Don't be afraid to tweak it to fit with your lifestyle and to how it works best for you.

This sample training schedule is intended for the athlete with the goal of swimming the Straits of Mackinac, who is not accustomed to swimming distances greater than an Ironman swim (2.4 miles). If you are already a marathon swimmer, keep doing what you're doing.

This, I believe, is a training schedule appropriate for a summer training schedule. In the winter, I find it best to concentrate more on strength and speed work, and less on distance training. In the summer, it is best to get out in the open water AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE and concentrate mostly on distance, and less on strength and speed work. I must stress that a pool can only take you so far in simulating what swimming in the open water of the Great Lakes is like. Please see my accompanying *Training & Strategy for Competitive Open-water Swimmers*. This is one of the handouts I give at clinics. It will give you my "how to" tips on distance, strength and speed training techniques for open-water swimming in general. You may refer to that while following this specific schedule as a guide. I hope this helps!

Monday: Half-distance swim

Swim half the distance of LAST week's long swim, until you peak at 2.5 miles. Incorporate some long-distance style speed work by pushing your "cruising" speed during your last stage after taking nutrition.

Tuesday: Swimming-specific strength training

Using bungee cords and large hand & forearm paddles, swim while pulling a bucket or parachute (sized appropriately to your current strength level), tie yourself to an immovable object, or hit the gym to do some swimming-specific weight training with cables & pulleys and dumbbells. In water resistance training, it is important to train both while being stationary, and while swimming untethered. Stick to lower weight, higher reps when weight training. You will find these techniques demonstrated on the Mighty Mac Swim YouTube Channel.

Wednesday: Half-distance swim

Swim half the distance of NEXT week's long swim, until you peak at 2.5 miles. Incorporate some long-distance style speed work by pushing your "cruising speed" during your last stage after taking nutrition.

Thursday: Swimming-specific strength training

Repeat Tuesday's strength workout, although you may vary your training method from what you did on Tuesday.

Friday: Rest

Saturday: Long swim

Start with a distance that you can swim comfortably, and gradually increase your distance each week until you peak at 5 miles approximately 2 weeks prior to the event. Take a couple of days off after peaking, stop strength training, and do an easy ½ - 1 mile swim every day during your taper. Take the 3 days prior to the event off completely, and load up on fluids, carbohydrates, and electrolytes. If you peak at more than 5 miles, this will only help you.

Sunday: Rest

Note on Cross-Training: Multi-sport athletes may add running, biking, paddling, etc. to strength training days, or even replace one of your weekly half-distance swims with another activity if you feel the cross training is benefiting you more. Listen to your body, and see how your long swims are progressing to determine your level of cross-training. CAUTION: Runners are most susceptible to leg cramps. Take plenty of electrolytes, carbohydrates, and fluids (all athletes), and don't neglect stretching.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q - Can you give me safety advice about swimming alone?

A - When you're swimming alone, I definitely recommend swimming along the shoreline so you don't have far to go to save yourself in the case of an emergency. I also recommend towing a lightweight bright-colored buoy so you are visible to boats. Those inflatable balls that mark swimming areas work well, tethered around my waist. The tether is just long enough for the buoy to bob in the water just behind my butt. That way it doesn't interfere with my kick.

Q - When training for distance, is it best to do a single long point-to-point swim or swim out-and-back repeats?

A - It usually works best to measure a relatively short course and then swim out-and-back repeats to get in your total distance. If you set out your nutrition at your entry point, then you'll never be too far away from your nutrition when it's time to feed. You might even anchor a feeding buoy in the shallow water, so you don't have to come ashore to feed. Swimming shoreline repeats in the Great Lakes has the added training benefit of being guaranteed to swim half your distance against a current of some level (wave height and wind direction data gathered from a weather buoy or weather forecast can help you plan just how much of a workout you want). Of course sometimes it's fun to do a long point-to-point swim, but then you will need to bring your nutrition with you ... either by having a boat or kayak follow you or by towing your nutrition behind you in a flotation device. If you go it alone with a flotation device, you will obviously have to arrange for a ride back, if you are not swimming back.

Q - What type of swimming gear and supplies will I need?

A - Wetsuits are required for the Mighty Mac Swim, due to water temperatures and the possibility of being out there longer than you think you will, so you may as well start getting used to wearing one now. Aquaman is the wetsuit I would suggest (www.aquamantri.com). In my opinion, Aquaman makes the best form-fitting wetsuit which allows the best freedom of movement on the competitive wetsuit market.

Goggles, more than anything are a matter of choice, as everyone has a slightly different cheek bone structure, which can lead to leaky goggles. If you have problems with leaky goggles, you may want to try Barracuda for a custom fit (www.barracudausa.com). Barracuda goggles have replaceable foam that form-fits to a person's cheekbone structure and even has a nose piece that adjusts with an allen wrench. They are optic grade, you can get tinted models, and even prescription lenses.

We will be furnishing you a swim cap for the event, but you may want to get one for training. Tucking your hair into a cap makes you more hydrodynamic and keeps your hair out of your face (for you long-haired types). A silicone cap is much better than a latex cap (lasts longer and are maintenance-free ... no baby powder needed), and are available from Aquaman (and most sporting goods stores). If you are concerned about the cold, Aquaman also sells a neoprene cap that really holds your body heat in. At the Mighty Mac

Swim, if you are wearing a neoprene cap, you must wear the cap we furnish for you over your neoprene cap ... but by doubling up with the caps, and with the neoprene, you will be more toasty.

Another item you might consider getting is tubes of Sportslick (www.sportslick.com). My opinion is this is the best skin lubricant on the market, and helps keep your wetsuit from chafing you in the high-friction areas like neck, shoulders, arm pits, and bends of the elbows.

Q - What advice can you give me about nutrition?

A - When it comes to nutrition, you have to be concerned with three things ... hydration, electrolytes, and the glycogen supply in your blood (blood sugar). Cramping is usually a sign that you are deficient in one or more of those areas. For hydration you must have water. You will also want to experiment with different sports drinks that are high in complex carbohydrates (not all sugar) and electrolytes (magnesium, potassium, sodium). Sports drinks are very much a matter of personal preference, so try out some different brands. I use meal replacement drinks when I am swimming long distances. For the Straits of Mackinac I do not believe it is necessary to use a meal replacement drink, but if you were to chug one just prior to starting the swim, you may have better staying power and be able to get by with less nutritional intake once you're swimming. I find that eating solid foods (like energy bars) does not always work well when trying to digest horizontally while swimming. Energy gels seem to work a lot better when you need a quick boost. My favorite supplement is a product called Electrolyte Stamina Tablets by Trace Minerals Research (www.traceminerals.com). They are absolutely the best product I know of to stave off cramping. Take one every hour that you train (with your sports drink, water, and occasional gel packet), and three every morning and night as daily supplements.

Q - If they make chicken and tuna-flavored cat food, why don't they make mouse-flavored cat food?

A - That one is a real puzzle. I spend hours thinking about it while I'm swimming. Let me know if you figure it out.