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#### 11 ESSENTIAL TYPES OF SWIM TRAINING GEAR Comments: 2



Ready to take your swimming to another level? Dive into the essential types of swim training equipment for faster swimming. Current photo via Jack Spitser/Spitser

Photography

BY OLIVIER POIRIER-LEROY

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□ :

Ready to take your swimming to another level? Dive into the essential types of swim training equipment

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But when it comes to improving swim performance, there is no shortage of swimming gear to upgrade swim strength, endurance, and technique.

Swim equipment like kickboards, pull buoys, fins, swim paddles, snorkels, and others can also help swimmers train around injuries and alleviate swim boredom.

In this guide to the essential types of swim training gear, we'll examine the most popular (and effective!) forms of swim aids.

Let's dive right in.

# ESSENTIAL TYPES OF SWIM TRAINING EQUIPMENT

The essential types of training equipment for swimmers include:

Swim goggles
Swim watch
Kickboard
Pull buoy
Swim paddles
Swim fins
Swim snorkel
Swim parachute
DragSox
Ankle band
Tempo Trainer

# THE DRYLAND COMBO THAT TURNS STRENGTH INTO SPEED

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#### SWIM GOGGLES

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Swim goggles are one of the essential pieces of swim equipment for your workouts in the pool, whether you are a beginner or a seasoned Olympic champion.

Swim goggles help you see the pace clock, whether the large, sweeping hand of the analog clock on the wall at the pool or the splits and pace on your swim watch.

Goggles help you to time your turns, touch on a full stroke, protect your eyes from pool chemicals, reduce eye strain when swimming outdoors, and help you avoid swimming full-steam into other swimmers in your lane.

See also: The 9 Types of Swimming Goggles

Swim goggles are also a training aid, especially in the age of heads-up displays with real-time tracking.

Pioneered by FORM Swim Goggles, and later FINIS with their own Smart Goggles, swim goggles have gone from being a tool to see the pace clock to *being* the pace clock.

#### **SWIM WATCH**

Swim watches are wearable devices worn in the pool and open water to track and monitor swimming performance, giving you valuable data to help improve your swimming.

A swim watch automagically counts all of your laps for you (well, *most* of the time), ensuring that you accurately track the distance swum during your

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Stroke count				
Stroke type				
Heart rate				
Average speed	Average speed			
Average pace/	Average pace/100			
Splits				
Stroke rate				
Stroke efficien	Stroke efficiency (typically measured as a SWOLF score)  GPS for open water tracking			
GPS for open v				
And more.				



Swim watches have come a long way in recent years regarding tracking abilities. For example, the workout app on my Apple Watch is smarty-pants enough to know when I am kicking on a board.





support include workouts and training plans that can be uploaded directly to your devices.

#### **KICKBOARD**

Kickboards are the first swimming accessories we learn to use during our earliest days in the pool. Kickboards isolate the legs and lower body to improve kicking strength and endurance.

By gripping the board, swimmers learn to fully engage the quads, hips, core, and feet to generate propulsion with the lower body.

Spending more time on the kickboard helps swimmers develop the leg endurance required to execute a more efficient stroke, finish races with a full kick, and is a great tool for breaking up longer swimming sets and workouts.

Kickboards come in a variety of shapes and sizes, with your "classic" tombstone EVA foam board being the most popular (and the one that will *always* be at the end of my lane when I go for a swim).

Other types of kickboards include arrowhead boards, pull buoy and kickboard combo aids, and my favorite kickboard for "connecting" the kick to regular swimming, the FINIS alignment kickboard.

The right kickboard for your swimming comes down to buoyancy, ergonomics, board shape, and flex of the board.

### **PULL BUOY**

Pull buoys are one of the classic swim training aids designed to help swimmers focus on the pull and upper





in the pool.

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Pull buoys can be used with paddles and an ankle band (or even resistance tools like a drag chute) to improve upper body strength in the water further.

A strong upper body is crucial for swimming fast; one study with elite competitive swimmers found that the upper body contributed 90% of propulsion during maximal velocity testing (Deschodt et al., 1999).

One odd aspect of swimming with a pull buoy is that it can often feel easier than full swimming (leading to being a crutch for some swimmers, ahem).

Swimming with a pull buoy feels easier because of the better body position and inactive legs dangling behind us.

#### **SWIM PADDLES**

Swim paddles, also known as hand training paddles, are a form of swimming equipment designed to enhance pulling strength and endurance.

The benefits of swim paddles include swim-specific power development, encouraging a stronger catch, and providing immediate feedback on whether you are using proper hand entry.

There are different types of swim paddles for different goals in the pool, including your classic "power" paddle (the most common type), finger-tip paddles, and antipaddles.

**See also:** 9 Best Swim Paddles for Stronger and Faster Swimming





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Swim paddles are a strength-development tool for swimmers that increase distance per stroke and help swimmers go faster, providing an opportunity to learn efficient body position (Gourgoulis et al., 2006).

Like all swim tools that create resistance and increase demand on the muscles and ligaments, use them progressively and avoid the urge to start with extralarge dinner plates on your hands.

A study published in the American Journal of Sports Medicine found that using swim paddles aggravated existing shoulder injuries in age group and nationallevel swimmers, so use this type of swimming equipment appropriately.

#### **SWIM FINS**





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And perhaps most important... Using swim fins is FUN.

Who doesn't like going Mach 5 across the length of the pool, tasting—even for just a few fleeting moments—the velocities of our swimming heroes?

Swim fins can be used in many ways to improve swim performance.

Some of my favorite ways to incorporate swim fins into my training include:

Overspeed work to "learn" efficient body positioning at high-velocity speeds

As part of my warm-up to decrease shoulder load

With paddles to generate huge bow waves that swallow the lane rope

Single-leg kicking to address leg kick imbalances

With a chute for maximum effort underwaters for a more powerful underwater dolphin kick.

#### And on and on.

The best swim training fins for you come down to your budget, workout goals, and the fin material that suits you best.

Swim fins come in short and long blade versions. Short blade fins are a better option for more experienced swimmers looking to maintain kicking tempo that more accurately reflects regular kick tempo. Long fins provide a little more buoyancy and are better suited for beginners.





Swim snorkels have exploded in popularity in recent years, becoming an essential piece of swim gear for age group swimmers, Olympic champs, masters swimmers, and recreational swimmers.

Swim snorkels enable swimmers to keep their face down in the water, promoting a better body position. This helps swimmers achieve a more hydrodynamic body line in the water.

Using a swim snorkel is a great option for swimmers who train long course as it gives extended opportunities to develop proper stroke rhythm.

Rocking out with a swim snorkel when doing kick sets is also a great way to learn how to kick with proper body position.

Or when you want to do front sculling but don't want to pick your head up like an otter to catch a breath.

The benefits of swim snorkels are too long to list in this article, but one of my favorites is that snorkels can help





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See also: 8 Best Swimming Snorkels for Better Technique and Faster Swimming

Snorkels are one of the best tools for swimmers of all levels looking to improve swim technique and performance.

#### SWIM PARACHUTE

Swim parachutes, also known as drag chutes, are resistance tools swimmers can use in the water to build strength and endurance that is highly swim-specific.

The chute dangles by a nylon cord behind you—which admittedly *can* get caught in the feet at times—creating extra drag that forces swimmers to work harder to get across the pool.

Using a swim parachute can help strengthen the catch phase of the pull, encourage better body position, and even help you balance out your stroke. Anecdotally, it's also a great core workout as the trunk works overtime to maintain a straight body-line.

Studies done with experienced competitive swimmers (Telles et al., 2015, Telles et al., 2017) found that training with a swim parachute positively affected "propulsive continuity" in butterfly and backstroke, making it a great tool for developing a smoother stroke.

Swim parachutes are portable, easy to stash in your mesh bag, and are a great power-development tool for swimmers who train on their own or who don't have access to power racks.

#### **DRAGSOX**





as you move your reet through the water.

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DragSox are an excellent option for swimmers who want to focus primarily on strengthening the kick. They function similarly to swim parachutes in that they increase resistance when doing full swimming, but personally, I find the "pull" effect stronger when using a chute.

DragSox don't get tangled up in your feet and can be used for other kicking drills like vertical kicking.

Like drag chutes, DragSox are easy to travel with and are a great option for the solo swimmer looking to get stronger in the pool.

#### **ANKLE BAND**

Ankle bands are a no-frills training aid that lock your feet into place when doing pull sets, eliminating any of the leg and foot movement that swimmers "accidentally" use when doing pull.

Bands remove the body's natural urge to move the legs in rhythm with the arm stroke, which can lead swimmers to feel like someone tied a cinder block to their ankles. But with time, you'll find that using a band encourages more core activation and a more efficient hip roll.

More advanced swimmers can also use bands without a pull buoy to *really* challenge them to maintain a high hip position in the water.

I've found that doing short-burst, full-intensity efforts with a band teaches a higher stroke rate, perfect for sprinters who find themselves stuck in low-gear stroke tempos.





Finally, we have the FINIS Tempo Trainer, a swim tool for helping swimmers master stroke rate and tempo.

The device clips onto your swim goggle strap and emits a rhythmic beep or chirp at your desired cadence or tempo, helping swimmers maintain a consistent stroke rate in the water.

This can help swimmers prepare for competitive situations by teaching appropriate speed and pacing (i.e. not spinning your wheels on the first lap), fixing excess hitches or gallops in the stroke, and even teaching a more rhythmic breathing pattern.

The Tempo Trainer can encourage swimmers to lengthen their strokes or, in the case of over-gliders, to shorten things up and get into the catch quicker.

One of the ways I used the FINIS Tempo Trainer when I first tested it was as a pace clock; by setting it to go off at a specific interval, the device can be used like the old and dreaded Beep Test from elementary school.

Perfect for pools with hard-to-read or non-existent pace clocks.

For swimmers who don't need all the bells and whistles of a swim watch or waterproof fitness tracker (or the price tag), the FINIS Tempo Trainer is an awesome piece of swim gear for more efficient swimming.

### WRAPPING THINGS UP

The right swim gear can help swimmers become stronger in the water, improve technique, and increase endurance. Swim gear can also help you train around injuries and eliminate a lot of the boredom of long, rote swim workouts.





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#### **ABOUT OLIVIER POIRIER-LEROY**

Olivier Poirier-Leroy is a former national-level swimmer, author, swim coach, and certified personal trainer. He's the author of *YourSwimBook*, a ten-month logbook for competitive swimmers.

He's also the author of the recently published mental training workbook for competitive swimmers, Conquer the Pool: The Swimmer's Ultimate Guide to a High-Performance Mindset.

It combines sport psychology research, worksheets, anecdotes, and examples of Olympians past and present to give swimmers everything they need to conquer the mental side of the sport.

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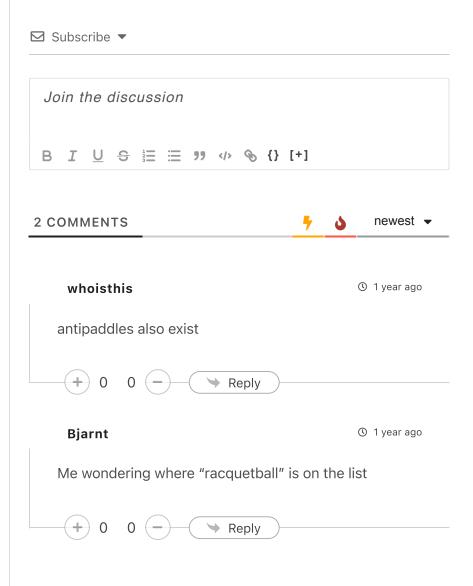
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Olivier Poirier-Leroy is a former nationallevel swimmer, swim coach, and bestselling author. His writing has been featured on USA Swimming, US Masters Swimming, NBC Sports Universal, the Olympic Channel, and much more. He

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