**10 WAYS SWIMMERS CAN GET MORE SLEEP**

**By Mike Gustafson**



If dogs are man’s best friend, then sleep is a swimmer’s best friend. Perhaps because we want what we can’t have. Early morning practices. Early Saturday preliminaries. Holidays spent at the pool, slogging up and down mile after mile inside a concrete grave while the rest of your non-swimming friends sleep in. Swimmers are constantly chasing sleep. We crave it, we need it, we demand it.

And yet, I've never met a swimmer who has ever said, “I get too much sleep.” Never happened. And perhaps that sentence has never been uttered by a swimmer, ever, in human history. I would believe it.

How can swimmers get more sleep? More of this necessary component to recovery that this very website said was one of the most important “supplements” and vital for fast swimming?

**Here are 10 ways swimmers can get more sleep:**

**1. Carpool.**
Carpool to practice. Carpool to meets. I’d guess that 98% of swimmers drive to the pool, which means 49% of swimmers could squeeze in a few more minutes of sleep if a teammate drove them to practice. Carpooling saves gas, saves money, and saves emotional exhaustion.

**2. Consistent sleep schedule.**
Set a time – 10:45pm, 11:15pm, 12:15am. Then stick to that time. That time is the point of no return. That time is when you drop everything and say, “My day is done,” and you retreat to the bed. Staying on a consistent sleep schedule allows your body to “know” when to expect sleep, allowing you to fall asleep faster and deeper, sooner. Don’t stay out until 2am one night, because you’ll spend a week trying to “get back on schedule.”

**3. Do (some) homework in the morning.**
Some swimmers have a break between morning practice and the beginning of class. Try doing homework in the morning, as opposed to at 1am at night. Your body rests the best between 10pm-2am. So if you’re staring at an hour of homework and it’s already 10pm, try going to bed then, and then waking up an hour earlier. You might find that you study better, are more focused, and better rested.

**4. Study groups.**
In college, study groups always helped me. When you’re in a group, you stay on task and studying is a bit more efficient than on your own. You have other people to ask questions, and many times you can be better prepared quicker when studying in a group. This will free up time for sweet, sweet sleep.

**5. Self-imposed curfews.**
This goes back to point #2, the “consistent sleep schedule” thing. Most swimmers stay on task during the week, and then (at least older swimmers out there) will stay up late on weekends. If you want more sleep, try utilizing a self-imposed curfew. “Sorry, but I have to be in bed by midnight or I turn into a sleep-deprived swim zombie.”

**6. Bring an inflatable raft to meets.**
When I was an age grouper, I brought a raft to morning prelims, found a nice, quiet corner of the natatorium or in a secluded part of the pool deck somewhere, and took a 30 or 45-minute power nap during the 500 freestyle heats. Many preliminary sessions are 4 or more hours long, and yet many swimmers only compete a minute or two. While you always want to cheer for teammates, at the same time, many swimmers just end up playing euchre or texting during prelims anyway. Why not get a little bit of sleep? Put out a little inflatable raft (mattress) and throw a towel over your head and grab 15 minutes of sleep.

**7. Carry around earplugs and an eye mask.**
Okay, you’ll look weird toting around earplugs and an eye mask wherever you go, but you never know when the need for an impromptu nap could arise.

**8. No “Breaking Bad” before bed.**
Don’t watch a crazy intense TV show before bed. That’s insane. You enter a world of action and adventure and intense graphics, then try to fall asleep? Even if you do sleep, your brain is still processing all that violence. Read a book. Draw. Turn off your phone and just put yourself in a quiet state. You’ll sleep better.

**9. Just Say No.**
All swimmers say no sometimes. No to social functions, no to nights out with friends. When I was a swimmer, some Friday nights, I just said, “Guys, sorry, but I need to sleep tonight.” And that’s okay. It’s okay to say no sometimes.

**10. Coaches, let your swimmers have an occasional morning off.**
I’ve never been a huge fan of morning practices anyway. Sleep keeps you happier, healthier, and more mentally refreshed. But if you do slog through morning practices, coaches, it’s sometimes great to give swimmers a morning off here or there. Use it as a reward after a successful meet. There’s nothing worse than spending 20-30 hours at a pool over a weekend, then reporting to morning practice at 6am.