

The Power of Routines: The “Boring Stuff” That Makes You Faster

If you’ve been around me on deck for more than five minutes, you already know I love a good plan. And I’m going to say something that might sound a little annoying at first, but I promise it’s true: the swimmers who improve the most over an entire season usually aren’t the ones doing the craziest extras. They’re the ones who are consistent with the simple stuff.

That’s what routines are. They’re not fancy. They’re not glamorous. They’re honestly kind of... boring. But they work.

And here’s the thing I’ve learned both from coaching and from being a swimmer for a long time: when life gets busy, motivation comes and goes, and meets feel stressful, routines are what keep you steady. They take the decision-making out of it. You don’t have to wonder, “What should I do before practice?” or “Why do I feel awful today?” because your body already knows what’s coming.

So let’s talk about the routines I want BNSC swimmers (and parents) to start thinking about, before practice, after practice, meet days, all of it. Not because I’m trying to turn your family into robots, but because your swimmer will feel better, recover better, and honestly just swim better.

Why routines matter more than you think

Swimming is a sport where we ask kids to do hard things really precisely. Hold a tight streamline even when you’re tired. Flip turn with speed, not fear. Keep your kick connected when your legs feel like bricks. That kind of skill doesn’t just magically show up. Your body learns it through repetition, and your brain learns it when you’re not completely fried.

That’s the science-y part in plain language: your body adapts when you give it consistent signals. When sleep, food, warm-up, and recovery are all over the place, the signal is messy. When those things are steady, your body actually absorbs the training. Same yardage, better results.

The before-practice routine: setting up a good swim before you even get wet

Let’s start with the biggest one, the one I will never stop talking about: sleep.

I know. Not exciting. But I’m telling you, sleep is the quiet MVP of swim season. It’s when the body repairs, builds, grows, and basically files away all the work you did in practice so you can come back stronger tomorrow. If a swimmer is constantly short on sleep, I can usually tell. They’re more sore, more emotional, more distracted, and their technique falls apart faster. That’s not a character flaw. That’s just biology.

So instead of thinking “more sleep when I can,” think “consistent sleep as a routine.” Same general bedtime, same general wake time. Not perfect, just consistent enough that your body isn’t constantly playing catch-up.

Next is food and water, and I'm going to make this as simple as possible because I don't want anyone overcomplicating it. Your swimmer does not need a perfect diet to be a great swimmer. They just need to show up with fuel. If you come to practice running on empty, practice is going to feel like punishment. If you come with a little gas in the tank, practice feels doable, and the swimmer can actually focus on swimming well instead of just surviving.

A good rule of thumb is a simple snack an hour or two before practice that has carbs and a little protein. Nothing wild. Just something that gives energy and doesn't sit like a brick in your stomach.

And then there's the very underrated routine of just getting to practice with a little time to breathe. If we're sprinting from the car to the pool, throwing goggles on, and jumping in already stressed, we're starting in the wrong place. Even five or ten minutes early makes a difference. It gives swimmers time to settle, get their gear organized, use the bathroom, and mentally switch into "practice mode."

The pre-swim routine: warm-up actually has a job

Warm-up isn't something we do just to fill time until the "real set." Warm-up is part of the real set. The point of warm-up is to wake up the body and the brain. We're bringing heart rate up gradually, getting blood moving, warming up joints and muscles, and reminding the body what good technique feels like before fatigue makes it harder.

This is why you'll hear us cue streamlines, tight body position, good breathing, quality turns, and strong walls even early in practice. We're basically telling the body, "This is the standard. This is what we're building today." That matters because once swimmers get tired, they fall back on habits. Warm-up is where we reinforce the habits we want.

Also, quick science moment: your nervous system needs a ramp-up. If a swimmer starts going hard while their body is still cold and half-awake, technique collapses faster and risk of injury goes up. So yes, we want heart rates up. Not instantly. Gradually. Then we can actually train.

The after-practice routine: recovery is part of training

This is where a lot of swimmers lose progress without realizing it. They work hard, then recovery is basically sprint to the car, collapse, eat whatever, stay up late, repeat.

Cool down matters. Not because it's fun, but because it helps the body shift out of "go mode." It brings heart rate down, helps muscles loosen up, and sets swimmers up to feel better the next day. When swimmers always skip cool down, they tend to feel tighter and more beat up, especially as the season builds.

Stretching is similar. I'm not asking anyone to do an hour-long stretching routine every night. That's not realistic. I'm asking for a short, consistent routine that keeps shoulders, hips, and ankles moving well. Swimming is repetitive, and repetitive sports make you tight in predictable

places. A little mobility work done consistently beats a huge stretching session done once every two weeks when someone feels awful.

And then there's the post-practice snack, which is honestly one of the easiest wins families can make. After practice, swimmers need carbs to refuel and protein to repair. It doesn't have to be fancy. It just has to happen most of the time. That routine alone helps soreness and energy levels so much.

The pre-meet routine: meet day goes better when it feels familiar

Meets can feel chaotic, especially for younger swimmers or families who are newer to the sport. That's why routines matter even more here. The goal is to make meet day feel predictable.

The night before a meet is the best time to be boring. Pack the bag. Lay out the suit. Make sure goggles are ready and you have backups. Pick the snacks. Figure out the arrival time. The calmer the night before is, the calmer the morning usually is.

On meet morning, I want swimmers eating something familiar. Race day is not the day to test a new breakfast or bring a snack they've never tried. Keep it simple, keep it reliable, and keep hydration steady through the day.

Then we get into the "right before I race" routine, and this is where nerves show up. Here's what I'll say as both a coach and someone who's been on the blocks a thousand times, nerves are normal. They're not a sign you're not ready. They're just energy. A routine gives that energy a place to go.

The best pre-race routine is usually short. It's a warm-up that wakes the body up, staying warm between events, and a mental reset that keeps the swimmer focused on one or two things, not seventeen.

If you're a parent, this is also a good spot to remember that the best meet-day support is steady, not intense. If your swimmer is quiet behind the blocks, that's not them being rude or moody. That's them locking in. Sometimes the best thing you can say is simple: "Have fun. Swim your race. I love watching you."

The post-meet routine: recovery first, analysis later

After a meet, swimmers are tired, sometimes emotional, and usually hungry. This is not the best moment for a deep dive into everything that went wrong in a race. Most swimmers don't need a car-ride breakdown. They need food, water, warmth, and sleep.

Recovery after meets is basic but powerful. Hydrate. Eat a real meal. Get good sleep. Move a little the next day. Your body doesn't get faster only from racing. It gets faster from racing and then recovering well enough to absorb it.

When it is time to reflect, I like a simple review: what went well, and what's one thing we're working on next. One thing. Not a list of ten. We learn, we move on, and we keep building.

If you want to start somewhere, start small

If all of this feels like a lot, here's what I want you to hear: routines don't have to be complicated to work. They just have to be consistent.

Pick a few habits and make them your thing. A consistent bedtime. A reliable snack before practice. Showing up a few minutes early so practice starts calm. Finishing cool down. Having a meet-night packing routine that doesn't involve panic.

Those small routines are how swimmers build real confidence. Not the "I hope I do well" kind. The "I know what to do because I do it every day" kind.

And that's what we're going for this season. Strong bodies, focused minds, and swimmers who know how to take care of the little things so the big things, like best times, have a chance to show up.