



Lesson 6: Mental Preparation

This is the last in the series of lessons to prepare you for doing the 2.1K Across The Lake Swim. It is intended to get you ready mentally and to have a great day!

First, good news: There are no new open water swim techniques left to learn. If you have followed all the previous lessons, you have all the skills needed for whatever the day throws at you! But there is much to mentally prepare for and digest about the event itself. The following outline gives you a plan for the week leading up to the ATLS, including the morning of the big day. The more you know about the event, the relaxed you will be.

I) The week leading up to the big event:

- Keep doing some regular training lake swims up to Thursday (two days before the big day), and if you need to go for a short swim on Friday, that is OK too. Key on staying comfortable in what you know you can do, and be especially focused on maintaining a relaxed breathing cadence. Don't push too long or hard--the fitness you have now will not change much in the last week.
- To improve familiarity, consider visiting or even swimming near the jetty at the start line area on the west side of the lake this week. This would be a great way to get a first glimpse at what to sight for at City Park, especially if you go in the morning.
- Do your best to clear of your mind of any major work, duties, and life stresses in the week before the swim.
- Be nice to yourself with healthy eating and sleep patterns, and avoiding alcohol, as much as possible. Your best night's sleep will likely be Thursday, not Friday (the night before).
- Package pickup days are Thursday and Friday—get all the info you need (most is supplied in your package and repeats information provided at the swim clinics). Bring your supporters with you, including your paddler if you have one, since they would benefit from more information about the morning of the swim as well. Enjoy the great vibe of swimmers on the same quest as you at the package pickup location.
- Have all of your swim gear packed and ready early Friday evening, along with your plan of when you will leave, what (if anything—see below) you might want to eat (and when) in the morning, who is driving or coming with you,

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where you will store your valuables, and where you hope to park. Read all of the instructions provided to you in your race package, so there is less to think or worry about when you go to bed. You don't want to be doing any of this at 11 pm—you should be sound asleep by then.

The morning of the event:

- Get up early enough to do your normal morning routine— bathroom, breakfast etc.—and in time to get to City Park early. You don't need much or even any breakfast, gels, or electrolyte drinks, but I suggest you eat what you normally do (if anything) prior to exercising (race days are not a time to change your routine). If you are a coffee hound, you can have a bit of coffee as well to wake you up—that may be all you need. You don't want to be in caffeine withdrawal half-way across the lake! But remember that the more you eat and drink (especially coffee), the more likely you will need to hit the porta-potties at either end of the swim course, which get lined up pretty quickly. There will be lots of food and drink at the finish line.
- Once you have arrived at City Park, you can put the lower half of your wetsuit on--don't pull it all the way up unless it is unusually cold.
- Make yourself aware of where important things are—the gear tent, the finish line corral, the washrooms, and the bus pickup point.
- Catch an early bus if you can—the lineups for the porta-potties at the start line are shortest earlier on. Listen to and ask questions to the ATLS ambassador on the bus for any updated info or last-minute instructions.
- The swim has a sequential start, so have a plan for when you will start your swim and who with (if anyone). Join your group by 7:45AM.
- From either the jetty or the beach, have a good look at where you will be going—look for the finish line arch, the sighting points above it (like the line of trees above it, and the notches and peaks of the mountains behind them), and even the things you can see to the left or the right of your swim course (things you should not be sighting toward!). Also notice where the local swim buoys are, the platforms, and the support kayakers.
- Get a warm-up swim in if you can, to loosen up your shoulders in the suit. Getting some water in your suit warms it up, so that the shock of cold water won't affect you at the beginning of the race. Find your support paddler if you have one, and make sure you both know where you will meet up.

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Swim start:

- Westbank First Nation will bless the swim with two important messages: a) We are all friends out there, sharing a unique experience together, so be supportive and if necessary provide assistance to anyone in distress, and b) Give reverence to the beauty of your surroundings and especially to the lake, which has supported all cultures living near it for thousands of years.
- Once in the water, enjoy the moment. It is okay to be a little nervous, but this is a little like getting married...the event will transcend you.
- Line up (“self-seed”) where you feel most comfortable—in the front if you feel you are going to be faster than everyone else, or in the back if you want minimal traffic to deal with.
- Once underway, the most important strategy is to develop a reliable, sustainable breathing cadence, that you can comfortably integrate with sighting.
- It is a unique experience being out in the middle of our beautiful lake as it carries you over toward the finish line. The lake is your friend—it does not want to swallow you up, it wants to support you on the surface!
- It does not matter what your swim time is. It is what it is. Enjoy the journey. You will be out there for a while. Perhaps 40 minutes, perhaps 60. Just keep plugging along. Stay within yourself, and do not compare yourself to others. This is your swim. Rely on a recovery stroke if you need to, work on sighting to swim straight, and remember that there is a lot of support on the lake keeping an eye on you.
- Once you are across and can see the bottom, keep swimming until your hands touch bottom before you stand up to cross the finish line. Since many people are dizzy when they first stand up after a long swim, keep your head down for several steps before running to the finish line timing mat.
- Suck up the positive energy on the beach when you arrive. You’ve got this! Visualize every part of your successful crossing, and you will have a great day!