

Tri Swim Coach  
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### **Are Fins Useful in Training?**

By Kevin Koskella

One of the most common questions I hear as a coach is, “Should I use fins?” The answer depends largely on your goals, your skill level and the type of fins.

Often times, especially in masters swimming, swimmers wear fins merely to keep up with other swimmers in their lane, or to advance to the fast lane and make tighter intervals. If you are strictly swimming for fitness, and do not care about your stroke technique, swim time, or energy conservation in a race, then this is a perfectly acceptable reason to use fins. Fins, especially the Zoomers-type, can help you go faster in a workout and burn more calories.

Most of us in the triathlon world are concerned with more than just fat burning. There are certain situations when it’s appropriate to use fins during a workout. Fins can help build strength in your legs. They can also allow you to consume more oxygen during your swim, which enables you to support the use of more muscle mass at greater intensity, and for a longer time. However, using fins on a regular basis for the desired effects of swimming faster and keeping from sinking in the water is ill advised.

If you have little or no kick, or your kick makes you go backwards while kicking on your back (not uncommon among runner-types), using fins for a short period of time will help your stroke and speed. The kind that work best are the shorter kind (Zoomers are the most popular). The reason is that using the fins allows you to concentrate on improving your upper body technique, as well as your overall endurance, without having to think about your kick at the same time. Since 90% propulsion comes from upper body in swimming, as a beginner it’s wise to concentrate your training on this aspect of the stroke. After stroke improvement and endurance are built, start weaning off fins, and do more and more of your swimming sets with bare feet. You may find that not only have

you made faster improvements in your stroke and speed, but your kick improved slightly as well, due to improved ankle flexibility.

Fins, especially the shorter, Zoomer-types, can be a very effective tool in swim training for open water and triathlon events. They can also be addictive and actually prevent you from improving your stroke and your race times. If you are looking into using fins, make sure you first understand how they will help you in accomplishing your goals.

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**STROKE TIP #3: In freestyle, your hands should pull all the way back past your hips. The last part of the stroke before recovery (arms coming out of the water) should be an acceleration behind you, and not up out of the water.**

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