

# Make pain your friend



**Natascha Wesch**

By Dr. Natascha Wesch, PhD



**Maggie MacNeil, a local international-level swimmer**

If you're an athlete who enjoys (and I mean LOVES) the pain from going to the max in training and competition, then it's likely you have made friends with pain (I'm talking about exertion pain, not injury pain). This is the pain you feel when you push yourself to the limit.

How this affects performance is largely a matter of perception. Some athletes interpret pain as a sign of weakness, or a signal to slow down. They get frustrated and discouraged, and these negative feelings increase the perception of pain. Pain is their enemy. However, some athletes interpret exertion pain as a sign they're going hard and coming closer to achieving their goals. They're motivated and inspired by their persistence and tenacity, and these positive feelings not only diminish their perception of pain, but increase confidence, motivation and focus. Pain is their friend.

For Maggie MacNeil, a local international-level swimmer, pain has helped her achieve greater results because of this perspective. Instead of fearing it, she uses pain to her advantage.

"With the help of Natascha and sport psychology, I have learned that I am able to push through the pain to get maximum results," said MacNeil.

I give pain a personality. His name is Pain, with a capital P. He's blue, with sharp teeth and claws that can sink into my muscles and lungs, and send fire throughout my body. I don't let Pain drag me down, though, and I don't fear him. We have a love-hate relationship.

I try to anticipate when Pain will show up. There's a certain point in a hard training set when I know I'll begin to feel the burn in my legs and the fire in my lungs.

When it arrives, I think to myself, "Hello Pain!

Welcome to my workout." Then I breathe through it, focus on my technique, and keep working. Acknowledging Pain doesn't make him go away, but by making Pain my friend, I don't fear Pain.

When Pain shows up, I know I'm working hard, pushing myself to the edge, and expanding my capacity. I'm getting better, stronger, faster. That's why I make Pain my friend!

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