**RELAXATION IS THE SOLUTION TO SWIMMING EXCELLENCE**  
  
These are some of the things you can do to stay calm when the heat of competition is turned up extra high.  
  
**#1 Stretch**Stretching is a great way to calm yourself and stay loose as long as when you stretch you keep your entire focus of concentration on what you are doing.  
  
**#2 Focus on YOU**Paying too much attention to your competition pre-race will raise your level of nervousness. Keep your focus on yourself before your race and you'll stay looser.  
  
**#3 Talk with teammates/friends**If hanging out with your buds pre-race keeps you loose and distracts you from thinking too much about your race, get in the habit of making that an important part of your pre-race ritual.  
  
**#4 Listen to music**A lot of swimmers keep themselves in control by listening to their favorite music. Be sure that the tunes that you play in your head are calming and don't wire you up for sound.  
  
**#5 Distract yourself**Many swimmers think too much about their race or opponents just before the start, and therefore work themselves up too much. Find other things that you can do pre-race that will distract you from these pressure-causing distractions. You can read, play video games, do homework (sorry about that), etc.  
  
**#6 Go somewhere relaxing mentally**I teach many of the swimmers I work with to go to a "safe place" in their mind's eye where they feel completely relaxed and far away. This can be a beach, a vacation spot, or anywhere else. If you mentally practice visiting this special place at night before bed, it will be available to you on race day.  
  
**#7 Do Diaphragmatic (deep belly) breathing**You can not freak out if you are breathing from your diaphragm. It is physiologically impossible. Learn to do diaphragmatic breathing. Sit quietly, inhale through your nose to a slow count of 4, pause, then exhale through your mouth to a little faster count of 7 or 8. Focus your concentration on the rise and fall of your diaphragm as you do this. Practice this at home for 4 minutes a day. When you're under pressure, one or two of these breaths will then help you chill out.