

My workout

Rebecca Adlington

The Olympic gold medal 400m and 800m swimmer, 22, tells us about her life-long motivation to swim and her tough training schedule

I've always been ambitious. No one's ever had to drag me to training sessions and I don't think I've ever hit my snooze button. Although I'm sure my parents wished I would when I was younger so they could get a lie-in instead of driving me to the pool! I do have days when I don't feel like training, especially if it's cold outside, but knowing my competitors will be training makes me get out of bed.

Right now I'm focusing on the Commonwealth Games in Delhi later this year. I've never been before, so I'm ecstatic I qualified. Qualifying for an event is never guaranteed because you never know if you'll pick up an injury, so I take my training one event at a time. Naturally the 2012 Olympics are in the back of my mind, as they probably are for every athlete in the world – and we British athletes are that little bit more motivated and determined to succeed. But I can't focus on what could be happening in two years time – I have to focus on the here and now. There's always something to improve on.

I swim for two and a half hours, twice a day, four times a week, and on the other days I do a swim session then go to the gym to work on strength and conditioning. I still work on technique all the time, as no one is perfect. I really like to do this when I'm tired, because that's when you can start flailing your arms about everywhere. My coach is great at those times, constantly reminding me to lift my elbows or head up – nagging me, really, but it works!

I've had the same coach since I was 12 years old. He knows me so well and is good at pulling me aside and asking what's wrong, which is good, because I can keep stuff bottled up. He doesn't let things fester, and it's the same with my family. They keep my feet on the ground and tell me how it is.

My life has always revolved around swimming. I have no idea what I'd be doing if I hadn't made it as a professional swimmer. From a very early age I was always happiest in the water. These days I feel more natural in the pool than out of it.

The number of people I meet who can't swim still baffles me. We live on an island! I've always loved swimming, whether it was racing competitors or against my dad on holiday when I was little. I love to encourage people to visit the pool. Saying that, I'm petrified of the sea. It's my biggest fear so I've never tried anything like scuba diving. It's the feeling of the unknown... I think there could be anything in there, like sharks. And it's so dark. I definitely feel safer in the pool!

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- To find your local swimming pool, classes and teachers, visit www.swimming.org.uk, where you can also get information on Swim for Free lessons for those aged 11 or over who can't swim, or call 0800-142 2214 to sign up. British Gas customers can claim a Free Family Swim Voucher by visiting www.britishgas.co.uk.
- To follow Rebecca's progress at the Commonwealth Games, visit her website, www.rebeccaadlington.co.uk.