



SWIM DRILL DESCRIPTIONS

Technique drills are critical to improvement in swimming. Whether you are a beginner or a former collegiate All-American, you need to do them. The number-one key to improvement in swimming is increasing your efficiency in the water: using less energy to make greater forward progress. Building swim-specific cardiovascular fitness, while also important, does very little to increase efficiency. Technique improvements are the best way to become more efficient, and drills are one of the most effective ways to improve technique. The majority of your swim workouts should include a drill set.

There is a large number of swim drills to choose from. Following are descriptions of those I believe are most helpful. Practice at least two and as many as six different drills in each drill set. Your daily workouts will prescribe only a number and length of drills (i.e. 6 x 50 yds), and does not specify particular drills. That is up to you, based on your (or a friend who is a knowledgeable swimmer) assessment of your swim stroke and its flaws. It is a good idea to do each of these drills occasionally and to focus on those that address the biggest problem areas in your swim stroke.

Chest Press

Swim facedown with your arms at your sides. Propel yourself by kicking only. Exhale into the water and turn your head to the side to inhale. Concentrate on keeping your chest deep and your hips and legs high toward the surface. This drill improves body position and kicking technique.

Side Kicking

Swim on one side with the lower arm extended straight forward and the upper arm resting on your upper side. Rest your head against your shoulder and look down so that your head is totally submerged. Propel yourself by kicking only. Exhale into the water and rotate your head slightly upward to inhale. Concentrate on keeping your hips and legs high. Swim one length and switch sides. This drill promotes proper technique and maximum rotation.

Layout Freestyle

Start by kicking on your side as in the Side Kicking drill. After 3-5 seconds, rotate onto your belly and catch up to your forward arm with the other arm, so that your two arms are now extended in front of you. Immediately perform a complete pull with the original leading arm and simultaneously rotate onto the other side. Kick for 3-5 seconds and then catch up and rotate once more. After swimming 2-4 lengths this way, reduce the amount of time you spend on each side to just 2 seconds. This drill improves body position and rotation.

Catch-Up Freestyle

Begin by kicking facedown with both arms extended in front of you. After 3-4 seconds, perform a complete pull with one arm and rotate fully to that side. Immediately rotate back to your belly and catch up to the forward arm with the arm that just pulled. Kick for 3-4 seconds and then pull with the other arm and rotate. Swim 1-2 lengths in this manner and then reduce the time you kick on your belly to just 1 second between pulls. Swim 1-2 lengths more and then pull twice with each arm before switching sides. This drill promotes better rotation and arm-stroke mechanics.

Cheating Catch-Up

Do the Catch-Up Freestyle drill as described above, but instead of waiting until your recovering hand is even with your forward hand before you begin to pull with the latter, start to pull when your recovery hand is about even with the elbow of the forward arm. Essentially, the Cheating Catch-Up drill is a cross between the Catch-Up drill and normal freestyle swimming. This drill helps you transfer the improvements you make with the Catch-Up drill to your freestyle swim stroke.

Count Strokes

Simply count the number of strokes you take while swimming one complete length of the pool with normal freestyle technique, and then try to lower the number of strokes taken in each of two or three subsequent lengths. You will achieve this by taking longer, more powerful pulls, rotating more, and allowing yourself to glide a little bit. Feel free to exaggerate these elements in order to decrease the stroke count. This drill helps to improve overall stroke efficiency.

Fingertip Drag

Swim a normal freestyle stroke, except consciously drag your fingertips across the surface of the water during the recovery phase. This modification helps you relax and use as little energy as possible during the recovery phase of the arm cycle. The Fingertip Drag drill can be performed in conjunction with the Thumb Scrape drill, in which you purposely scrape your thumb against your thigh during the release phase of the arm cycle (as your hand exits the water). This modification promotes complete arm extension and proper hand position in the release.

Fist

Swim with your fists clenched. This drill teaches you to rotate your shoulder and bend your elbow in the catch portion of the arm cycle in order to create a powerful "paddle" for the pull. If you do this correctly, you will swim with only slightly less power than you do with open hands.

Bilateral Breathing

If, like most triathletes, you are only able to inhale with your head turned to one side (usually the right side for right-handed swimmers and the left side for left-handed swimmers), make this drill a regular part of your drill set repertoire until

you are able to breathe as comfortably on your weak side as you are on your dominant side. Just swim your normal freestyle stroke while breathing on every third stroke (right/left/right) instead of every second or fourth stroke (right-only or left-only). You will be terribly clumsy on your weak side at first, but stick with it and you will steadily improve.

Sighting

Sighting is an important skill when you swim in open water without lane lines to guide you. It consists of modifying your swim stroke to look ahead and spot a "landmark" to aim toward. In a normal freestyle stroke, you turn your head directly to one side or the other to inhale and then turn your head back to a neutral position with your eyes looking toward the bottom. When you sight, you instead turn your head forward to spot a landmark, and inhale before submerging your face underwater to exhale, without interrupting your arm movements. When practicing sighting, swim normally and sight every 4-6 strokes.