

SWIMMING VIDEOS AND TRICKS FOR IMPROVING YOUR STROKES

IMPROVING FRONT CRAWL

<http://www.swimming.org/swimfit/health-front-crawl/>

IN THE WATER

- Aim to keep your body position as flat as you can to be streamlined in the water with a slight slope down to the hips to keep the leg kick underwater
- Try to keep your stomach flat and level to support your lower back.
- With eyes looking forward and down, your head should be in line with the body and the water level should come between your eyebrows and hairline.
- Try to keep your head and spine as still and relaxed as possible. Instead, rotate your hips and shoulders to generate momentum through the water. Your head should only join the rotation when you want to breathe
- Your shoulder should come out of the water as your arm exits while the other begins the propulsive phase under the water.
- The hips should not rotate as much as the shoulders.

ARM ACTION

- Keep your elbow slightly bent as you reach your hand in front of your body to enter the water.
- Entry should be between the centre line of the head and the shoulder line and the hand should be directed with the palm facing down and out so the thumb first enters the water first.
- Don't start pulling back as soon as your hand is in the water – you should give yourself room to reach forward under the water before you start to bring your hand back to the body.
- After entering the water, the arm should perform a three-sweep motion.

- With your elbow slightly bent, sweep forward, then back towards the center of the body, then out towards the thighs – imitating an hour glass shape.
- Maximize the efficiency of your stroke by completing the whole arm action and not bringing your arm out of the water before it reaches your leg.

KICKING

- Your legs should be close together with ankles relaxed and in a continuous motion.
- There's no need to take large down and upbeats – a steady, small motion is fine. While the most pressure should be on your feet, remember to move your whole legs.
- Try to keep your legs straight as possible. There should be a slight knee bend between the end of the upbeat and beginning of the downbeat but generally the straighter your legs, the more efficient and powerful the kick.
- The more kicks per cycle, the more energy you will use. Sprint swimmers will typically use six or eight kicks for a cycle but someone swimming longer distance should use fewer, more pronounced kicks.

BREATHING

- Try to keep your head turn as smooth as possible when you breathe. Your neck should remain smooth with your head and spine joining the rotation of the shoulders.
- One side of the face should remain in the water and you may want to stretch your mouth to one side to keep it clear.
- Try not to lift your head too much out of the water – the more your head raises, the more your feet and legs will sink in the water.
- After a sharp inhale, turn your face quickly and smoothly back into the water in time with the rotation of your shoulders.
- Exhalation takes place in the water when the head is back to a neutral position and can be gradual or explosive.
- The regularity of breathing is not set in stone – it is better to simply inhale when necessary. A standard technique is to breathe every three strokes, thus alternating the side which the head turns and maintaining balance through the stroke.

TURNING

- When approaching the wall, your last two arm strokes should stop with your hands by your thighs.
- Take your body into a tuck position by bending at the hips and knees. Rotate around the horizontal axis in a somersault, throw your legs over your hips to the wall and open your knees as you plant your feet on the end of the wall.
- Powerfully straighten your legs to transfer the momentum away from the poolside.
- Push your arms in front of your head, squeezing the ears, with the hands one on top of each other and twist back to your front as you're moving forward.
- Parallel to the water surface, use an alternating or dolphin leg kick under the water as the momentum from the push off slows down.
- Then start your arm action with your first arm starting while the body is still slightly submerged – this will help break your head to the surface.

IMPROVING YOUR BACKSTROKE

<http://www.swimming.org/swimfit/health-backstroke/>

IN THE WATER

- Aim to keep your body position as flat as you can to be streamlined with the water with a slight slope down to the hips to keep the leg action underwater.
- Don't let your hips drop too low as this will slow you down – try and keep your body close to the surface of the water.
- Your head should be still and your neck relaxed. Holding your head up too high will cause strain to the neck and slow you down in the water.
- The water level should cover your ears and your eyes should look up and back.
- Like in front crawl, generate momentum by rotating your shoulders and your hips. As one arm lifts out of the water, the other starts the propulsive phase underneath the surface.

ARM ACTION

- Lead with your thumb as your arm comes out of the water. The arm should be lifted out by the movement of the shoulders – not the other way round.

- Your little finger should enter the water first with your arm straight and your palm facing outwards. Your arm should pass by your ear before entering the water between the shoulder line and the center line of the head.
- Don't immediately pull with your hand after it enters the water – this will create resistance.
- Instead, turn your palm so it is facing the bottom of the pool and scull your hand outwards and downwards until it reaches a position in a line between your upper chest and shoulders with your elbow bent.
- At this point, rotate your hand again so your palm is facing towards your feet, then push through the water until your arm is fully flexed by the thigh and ready to be lifted out of the water again by the rotation of the shoulders.

KICKING

- Keep your legs close together and kick from the hips rather than the knees.
- Keep your ankles relaxed and your knee slightly bent on the downbeat.
- Kick as hard and as fast as you feel comfortable. Sprinters may kick up to six beats per arm cycle whereas longer distance swimmers will typically use less.

BREATHING

- Avoid holding your breath as much as possible. Typically, a breath is taken every time an arm completes a full cycle. Try breathing in as one arm passes your ear and exhale as the other arm passes.
- A consistent breathing pattern will aid the rhythm of your stroke.

TURNING

- As you approach the wall, rotate your body on to the front and stop both arms at the thigh.
- Perform a forward somersault underwater and plant your feet on the wall with your knees open.
- Staying on your back, straighten your legs powerfully and squeeze your arms to your ears with your hands on top of the other.
- Try to stay streamlined and parallel to the water surface.

- Start an alternating or dolphin leg kick under water as you feel your momentum slowing down and start your first arm action while the body is still slightly submerged, helping to bring the head to the surface.

IMPROVING YOUR BREASTSTROKE

<http://www.swimming.org/swimfit/health-breaststroke/>

IN THE WATER

- Your body position should be with your head facing forward in line with your body.
- Keep your shoulders, hips and legs as horizontal as possible but slope your body slightly to allow the leg kick to stay beneath the water.
- The leg kick uses your core and abdomen muscles more than freestyle so it's important to not to let your hips drop in the water. Your legs should be behind you rather than below you.
- Try to keep your neck and shoulders as relaxed as possible to aid the arm action and reduce strain. Look downwards as you glide to avoid straining your neck.

ARM ACTION

- From the glide position the hands should be pitched down and out.
- Keep your elbows high as you skull your hands out and round.
- Your hands should then sweep back in to the body as though they were to meet at the upper chest.
- Try not to sweep your arms too wide – remember much of the propulsion comes from the legs – not the arms.
- Your hands can recover under or over the water but your elbows should remain below the surface.
- Your arms can then stretch forward with your hands close together to restart the arm action.

KICKING

- In contrast to front crawl, the majority of propulsion comes from the leg kick.

- Your knees should be just a little over hip-width apart, facing down, slightly out behind the hip line.
- Turn your feet out as they sweep out and backwards in a circular action. Keep your feet flexed rather than loose.
- The legs finish together, long and in a streamlined position with the feet in-toed.
- The legs are recovered to bring the heels towards the seat with the soles of the feet facing outwards. Concentrate on bringing your feet to your bum rather than your knees to your chest.

TIMING

- Good timing of the arm action and leg kick are imperative to make the most out of your breaststroke.
- Try to time your arm action and leg kick so there is always something propelling you through the water.
- The arms will be propulsive while the legs recover and the legs propulsive while the hands recover.

BREATHING

- Lift your shoulder to bring your face out of the water to breathe. Don't raise your head – let the head naturally rise with the shoulders so your chin is resting just above the water.
- Lifting your head rather than your shoulders can lead to back pain and lowers your hips which will increase resistance.
- Inhale through your mouth before letting your shoulders drop as you sweep with your arms. Exhalation usually occurs explosively during the glide.

TURNING

- Your hands should touch the wall simultaneously below, at, or above the water surface.
- Rotate your body on its side as the hips pike, knees tuck and feet plant on the wall.
- Move your higher hand over your head to spear and push through the water as your kick off from the wall.

- Stay streamlined and parallel to the water with your chin on your chest after extending your legs.
- Perform one long, propulsive arm action with your hands staying close to the body line and finishing at your thighs.
- Keeping your hands close under your body, bring your arms back to the front of your head and powerfully kick to continue momentum.
- As you lift your head, start your regular arm action with your head breaking the surface before the hands being to sweep back to the body.

IMPROVING YOUR BUTTERFLY

<http://www.swimming.org/swimfit/beginning-butterfly-for-competitive/>

IN THE WATER

- Your body should be led by the crown of your head with your shoulders and hips horizontal.
- Try to keep your body as close as possible to the surface of the water.

ARM ACTION

- The arm action can be split into three propulsive, simultaneous sweeps.
- The arms should stretch out in front of the body above the water surface and be led into the water by the thumb. The hands should enter about shoulder width apart with elbows bent and slightly higher than the hands.
- Your hands then sweep down and out to form a Y shape in front of the body. Turn and sweep your hands back in towards each other, keeping your elbows high.
- Finally, turn your hands up and back and sweep parallel to the side of your body.
- Recovery of the arms is aggressive as you stretch them back out in front of you to re-enter. Keep your arms out of the water but try to avoid lowering your hips – the aim is to keep as streamlined as close to the water as possible.

KICKING

- The leg action comes from the hips. The heels and soles of your feet should break the surface from underneath with your knees slightly bent on the upbeat.
- Powerful downbeats of the feet then propel the body forward. Try to keep your legs close together with your ankles relaxed.

- Your downbeat kick should occur as the arms enter and sweep out.
- Try to kick twice per arm cycle – once to propel your arms out of the water for recovery and once as the arms enter the water.

BREATHING

- The most common butterfly breathing is to the front.
- Like in breaststroke, your shoulders should lead your head out of the water. Your front should rise naturally with the undulation of your body.
- Keep your chin in front of your forehead and inhale quickly in through your mouth.
- After inhalation, quickly lower your head before exhaling quickly under the water through your mouth and nose. Your head should re-enter the water before your arms.
- Exhalation usually occurs during the final upsweep and inhalation as the arms start to recover.
- Some competitive swimmers choose to breathe to the side. This technique involves the same timing as breathing ahead but the swimmer turns their head to one side for inhalation rather than lifting their head.
- Breathing to the side can help keep the body closer to the water but many swimmers find the neck twist uncomfortable.
- The most common breathing cycle is once every two arm cycles but some competitive swimmers choose to swim every cycle for longer races or every three cycles for shorter races.
- Another common technique is breathing twice every three cycles – just use whichever you find most comfortable.

TURNING

- As you approach the wall for the turn, your hands should touch simultaneously below, at, or above the surface like in breaststroke.
- After touching, immediately thrust one hand backwards away from the wall. Next, rotate your body on to its side by poking your hips and tucking your knees before planting your feet on the wall.
- As you push off, powerfully straighten your legs to transfer the momentum away from the side of the pool.
- Start a dolphin leg kick underwater as your momentum slows down, keeping your arms in front of you, ready to start the propulsive phase under the water.

- The first arm pull – to a Y shape – should be timed while the body is still slightly submerged but parallel to the water surface.

IMPROVING YOUR STARTS OFF THE BLOCK

FRONT CRAWL AND BUTTERFLY STARTS

- With your toes on the edge of the pool or blocks, bend your knees and keep your feet about hip width apart.
- Lift your hips high but not back and tuck your head in towards your knees. Stretch forward with your arms and hold your hands to the side of the pool or blocks.
- Push into the water with your feet, looking up just before you enter the water so your body follows your head into the pool as streamlined as possible.
- Don't worry about diving as far forward as possible. Aim to pass your body through the same point your hands led the way into the water.
- Keep your hands in front of you and your body in a streamlined position and use a flutter or dolphin kick to propel yourself through the water before rising to begin your stroke.
- According to rules from world governing body FINA, a swimmer's head must have broken the surface before the 15m mark.

BREASTSTROKE STARTS

- Swimmers will dive in for breaststroke in the same way as in front crawl and butterfly.
- However, in breaststroke competitions, swimmers are not permitted to use a continuous dolphin or flutter leg kick at the start or turns.
- Instead, competitors are allowed one arm stroke back to their legs (like after a turn) and a single dolphin kick, followed by a breaststroke kick before they must begin their stroke above the water.

BACKSTROKE STARTS

- Back Crawl (Backstroke) is the only event where swimmers start in the water.
- Using starting blocks, take up a crouching position while holding on to the blocks and with your feet on the wall. The aim is to be as far out of the water as possible before diving in.
- To start, push slightly upwards with your legs and throw your arms and head in front of you.

- Your body should be arched so only arms and legs are initially in the water before the rest of the body enters as smoothly as possible.
- Once in the water, try and stay as flat and streamlined as possible and use a dolphin or flutter kick to propel yourself far as possible before rising to the surface to begin your stroke.
- Elite swimmers tend to use the maximum 15m permitted underwater because swimming underwater is faster than on the surface.