



## The five keys to triathlon swimming

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Triathlon swimming is different from competitive swimming. Although the goals are the same--complete the distance as fast as possible--triathlon requires you to be as efficient as you can in order save energy for the bike and run later on. In fact, many triathletes feel that the race does not really start until they get on the bike, and they think of the swim as a warm-up for the hard parts still to come.

Most of your triathlon swim training should focus on perfecting your technique and getting used to the distance you need to swim in the race. As your technique improves and you gain experience in open water, you can begin to focus on increasing your speed. Your greatest improvements in speed will occur as your technique improves. The more efficient your swimming is, the less energy you need to complete the distance in a faster time. But the biggest challenge you need to overcome is learning to use the resistance created by the water to your advantage, rather than letting it slow you down.

Before you begin to work on your swimming technique, you need to be able to control your breathing and maintain a relaxed rhythm. Next time you swim, think about starting to exhale as soon as your face re-enters the water, and then exhale completely before you take another breath. One of the "secrets" to swim-breathing is to only inhale when your face is out of the water. If you're taking the time to exhale and then inhale, your breath and rhythm will be out of whack, and you'll feel out of breath.

The best way to improve your technique may be to take a class or get some instruction to drive home these key elements to effective swimming. These will reduce your drag and you'll find you're using less energy to move through the water. Remember, learning new swim techniques is often about breaking bad habits and teaching your body to move in new ways. It takes time and practice, so try swimming the drills suggested in each key. They will help you to think about what you're doing in the water, and how your body moves.

### Front Quadrant Swimming

Our natural tendency is to swim with our arms in opposition--one arm forward and the other arm backward. This is a very unbalanced position and creates a lot of drag. Front Quadrant swimming means one arm or hand is always in front of your body. Extend your arm as it enters the water -- as if you are reaching for the end of the pool, and keep that arm extended just below the surface of the water until your other arm begins to enter the water. This is not a natural movement, but it will pull you through the water more effectively.

**Drills:** Alphabet Drills, One Arm Drill, Catch-Up Drill.

### Streamline Body Position

This means getting your body long and thin to reduce drag. You should look like a torpedo in the water. When you extend your arm forward, try to press your shoulder against your head and against your ear while you keep your head down, facing the bottom of the pool--don't look forward! As you reach your hand forward, shrug your shoulder to further extend your arm. The key to being streamlined is to keep your arm next to your ear as you reach forward and glide. Remember to keep the arm straight.

**Drills:** One Arm Drill, Catch-Up Drill.

### Horizontal Body Position