

# 8 TIPS FOR FASTER KICKS

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The role of kicking in swimming is a matter for study, research, debate and discussion, but one thing we do know: better kicking equals better swimming.

**There are eight key elements that will help improve your kick:**

## **1 LOOSE LEGS**

The key to fast swimming and fast kicking is to stay loose and relaxed.

Too many swimmers think fast kicking means hard kicking. The great swimming coach, Yoda, once said, "Unlearn what you have learned." By that, he meant that to progress-as a Jedi (and a swimmer)-you need to forget about trying harder when trying to go faster.

The faster you want to go, the more relaxed you have to be. This is especially true of kicking.

When trying to kick faster, keep your legs loose and relaxed. Increase your foot speed, but keep your legs loose and flowing.

## **2 STRONG HIPS**

The real power in swimming is in your hips. (Just look at the size of the muscles around your hips and butt compared to your ankles and feet!)

Great kicking starts in the hips, then the power builds and flows down your legs: hips, thighs, knees, shins, feet; hips, thighs, knees, shins, feet.

Start your kicking with a small but powerful movement of your hip, then allow the power to build as the muscles around your thighs, knees, shins and feet all join in sequence to produce real H kicking strength.

How do you practice this?

Go for a walk!

You kick the way you walk-with your hips, thighs, knees (slight bend), shins and feet working in sequence. Think about that the next time you go for a walk: "My walking is helping my swimming!"

## **3 RHYTHM**

Rhythm is the crucial element in all efficient movements.

Start simply. When kicking in backstroke and freestyle, count, "1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4, 1-2-3-4," and so on to start to develop a consistent kicking rhythm.

In breaststroke, use a rhythmic mental "chant" like, "Long and strong, long and strong, long and strong" or "Reach long, kick strong reach long, kick strong; reach long, kick strong" to develop flow and real rhythm.

Music really helps. When you start kicking practice, imagine a song that has the same beat and rhythm as your kicking, then beat out the rhythm with your feet as you practice.

## **4 LONG LEGS**

Long legs can build kicking power more effectively than short legs.

Knowing this fact, you obviously have two options:

\* Have plastic surgery to add some inches to the length of your legs; or

\* Keep your own legs long (and loose) when you kick. (This is obviously a far better and cheaper option than having plastic surgery!)

Try to keep your legs as long as possible, as often as possible in the water. Point your toes-but without tension-and stretch your toes toward the wall behind you with each kick.

## **5 FLEXIBILITY**

Flexibility allows you to get into efficient swimming positions with little or no effort.

Flexibility is not only important for minimizing injuries, but in terms of kicking, it means that you can keep your legs long and loose and build power in a flowing sequence from hips to toes.

Work on flexibility everyday, particularly around your hips, thighs, knees, shins and especially your feet. Great kickers tend to have loose, flexible ankles.

## **6 STRENGTH**

Get stronger.

Great kicking is a combination of three things:

- \* Long legs: Technique
- \* Loose legs: Flexibility
- \* Strong legs: Strength Training

The combination of these factors makes a great kicker. Strong legs without flexibility will not work. Loose legs without power will not work. You need all three to achieve optimal kicking efficiency.

Why not ride your bike to practice or school three times a week? Or take up cross country running during the winter? Perhaps you can start a leg power program at the local gym with a trained and qualified instructor. But most importantly: when you train, do plenty of quality kicking with great technique all year-round!

## 7 FAST KICKS

During your workouts, kick as you swim. Practice fast kicks.

Try some timed kick goal sets. Try to achieve your kicking goals and standards with the same determination and passion as you do when you chase your swimming goals. Here are some sample kicking sets:

\* Kick 4 × 25 meters (with fins) on 45 seconds. Add the times from each 25. Try to make the combined time less than your personal best (PB) swim time. When you can achieve this goal, make the rest period shorter—for example, 4 × 25 meters on 40 seconds, then 4 × 25 meters on 35 seconds. Then try it without fins!

\* Kick 50 meters within 10 seconds of your PB swim time. Then aim for PB plus 9, then 8 and so on. How close can you get your 50 meter PB kick time to your 50 meter PB swim time?

\* How far can you kick in your 100 meter PB time?

- 50 meters = OK
- 55 meters = Fair
- 60 meters = Good
- 65 meters = Very good
- 70 meters = Excellent
- 75 meters = Outstanding
- More than 80 meters = Call FINA collect and tell them!

\* How fast can you kick 200 meters of your best stroke?

- Over 5 minutes = Work harder on your kick
- 4:45-5:00 = OK
- 4:30-4:45 = Fair
- 4:15-4:30 = Good
- 4:00-4:15 = Very good
- 3:45-4:00 = Excellent
- 3:30-3:45 = Outstanding
- 3:15-3:30 = Unbelievable
- 3:00-3:15 = World-class
- Under 3 minutes = World Record Holder!

## 8 UNDERWATER KICKING

It is important to maintain momentum when kicking underwater off the wall.

In butterfly, backstroke and freestyle, master these three crucial kicking underwater techniques:

\* Kicking underwater.

Underwater fly kick needs to be fast and powerful with strong kicking in both directions. The kicks should be relatively small—ideally, not much deeper or wider than your hips.

\* Kicking to the surface.

As you start to move toward the surface, keep kicking fast, powerfully and deliberately. Do not allow your body simply to "pop" up to the surface.

\* Kicking into your first stroke.

This is the most important part of the underwater kicking process. The speed you generate under the water must be as close as possible to the speed you want to achieve as you explode from the water into your first stroke. When racing freestyle or backstroke, try to have your underwater fly kicking speed as close as possible to the kicking speed of your full stroke swimming

# 25 Ways to Improve Your 25

Swimming World and Junior Swimmer, Feb 2004 by Whitten, Phillip

Four of the greatest sprinters of all-time and two of their coaches offer 25 tips on how to swim fast. There's nothing more fun than swimming fast. And whether you're a 10-and-under racing 25 yards, a high school or college swimmer competing in a 50, or a potential Olympian bearing down in the final 25 meters of your 200 meter event, you need to know how to sprint.

To find out how to improve your ability to swim a fast 25, Swimming World asked four of the greatest sprinters of all-time and two of their coaches for their advice. The swimmers are:

\* **Natalie Coughlin**, Swimming World's female World Swimmer of the Year in 2002, world record holder in the 100 meter back (59.58), and American record holder in the 100 meter free (53.99) and 200 back (2:08.53).

\* **Inge De Bruijn** (Inky), triple Olympic gold medalist in Sydney in 2000 and world record holder in the 50 meter free (24.13), 100 free (53.77) and 100 fly (56.61).

\* **Gary Hall Jr.**, four-time Olympic gold medalist and American record holder in the 50 meter free (21.76).

\* **Dana Torres**, four-time Olympian and American record holder in the 50 meter free (24.63) and 100 fly (57.58).

*The coaches are:*

\* **Mike Bottom**, associate head men's coach of the University of California and coach of numerous world-class sprinters, including Gary Hall Jr. and Anthony Ervin.

\* **Teri McKeever**, head women's coach of the University of California and coach of Natalie Coughlin.

## Here's what they had to say:

### When You Race...

- The easiest way to improve your 25 times is to work on the start. It is one of the most crucial parts of a sprint event. It's rare that age group coaches work on starts, but improving your start will improve your time, something in which all coaches should be interested! (All)
- When you start, focus intently on listening for the horn and reacting as fast as you can. (Inky)
- Enter the water cleanly, with almost no splash. Think of your entire body entering through one small hole in the water. (All)
- Don't breathe. You shouldn't have to breathe at all in a 25 yard or meter race, and in a 50 you should not have to take more than two or three breaths. (Dara)
- Keep your head position steady and look down at the bottom of the pool. (Dara)
- Do not look around during your race. (Coach Mike)
- Keep up a fast turnover, but make sure you maintain your feel for the water and a good grip on the water. (Inky)
- Work on your kick. The engine on every motor boat is positioned at the back. It pushes everything in front of it forward. Think of your kick as your engine. Increase the horsepower, and you're going to have a faster boat! The fastest swimmers in the world have the fastest kicks. Some swimmers can kick under a minute for 100 meters flutter kick! (Gary)
- Keep up a steady 6-beat kick. (Dara)

- Know where the end of the pool is in relation to the "T" on the bottom. Time your finish using the "T" instead of the wall. You can see the "T" several strokes out, which will give you time to adjust your stroke length for a perfect finish. (Coach Mike)
- When reaching for the wall, don't finish by reaching when on your stomach. To get the best extension, turn on your side as you reach for the wall. (Dara)
- Finish hard. It all comes down to the end of the race. (Inky)
- When You Practice...
- Use your head while you're racing, not right before the race. While you're in practice, think about the race. Train your brain, not just your body. (Gary)
- Practice holding your breath-always under the supervision of your coach and with a partner. (Dara)
- When practicing, use a front-end snorkel to perfect your no-breath technique. (Coach Mike)
- When you swim long distances, either drill or swim perfect freestyle stroke technique or swim alternate strokes. (Coach Mike)
- Work on your dive and finish every day. Make sure you always practice your dives into deep water. (Coach Mike)
- Practice timing your finish using the "T" instead of the wall. The more you practice adjusting your stroke length as you come into the wall for a turn or the finish, the more confidence you'll have that you can do it when it counts most. (Coach Mike)
- Try using cord assists in practice, making sure you hold the water, especially when the cord loosens. (Natalie)
- Here's a fun thing to do in practice: running dives. Remember to keep your momentum as you break the surface. (Natalie) Try one of my favorite sprint sets: 4 x 25. The first is 12-1/2 blast, 12-1/2 easy; the second is 12-1/2 easy, 12-1/2 blast; the third is 25 easy focusing on form; and the last one is 25 blast. (Natalie)
- Hold your breath for five to 15 seconds in the middle of the pool, floating in a balanced position. When the coach blows the whistle, explode into a finish or a turn. (Coach Teri)
- Given the importance of a strong, consistent, fast kick, train appropriately, with lots of emphasis on fast kicking. (Coach Teri)

### **Out of the Water...**

- Play other sports. Playing tennis or hitting a baseball may not help your stroke technique, but it will train your body to be a better, more well-rounded athlete, improving your body coordination. When you swing a baseball bat, think "trunk rotation." Figure out ways to apply these other activities to swimming. (Gary)
- Have Fun! It's no coincidence that every winning athlete in a post game/race interview says, "Oh, I was just out there having fun!" It shows. (Gary)