



How to be a better swimmer

Swimming offers a whole body workout, exercising almost every muscle we have, it's also great for cardiovascular fitness, building endurance, lung capacity and muscular strength. Swimming is a non-impact activity – when you swim the water acts a cushion around your body – so it's good for everyone, even those with injuries.

Most of us would like to be better swimmers and it's easier to improve than you might think. By making a few simple adjustments to your stroke and stepping your training up a notch you could be giving Rebecca Adlington a run for her money before you know it!

The programme

This programme* has a different session each week for six weeks, ideally this session should be repeated 2-3 times each week.

	Session	Comments	WEEK ONE
Warm up	4 lengths front crawl 4 lengths legs only (using a float) 4 lengths arms only (using a float between legs)		
Main set	Front crawl: 12 x 1 length / 30 secs rest. Count the number of strokes you do each length and aim to reduce the number each time		
Warm down	4 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	28 lengths / 700 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		

	Session	Comments	WEEK TWO
Warm up	8 lengths front crawl 2 lengths legs only 2 lengths arms only		
Main set	Front crawl: 6 x 2 lengths at 90% effort 45 secs rest between each set		
Warm down	8 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	32 lengths / 800 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		

	Session	Comments	WEEK THREE
Warm up	8 lengths front crawl		
Main set	Front crawl: Try to maintain an even pace throughout 2 lengths / 30 secs rest 4 lengths / 30 secs rest 8 lengths / 30 secs rest 4 lengths / 30 secs rest 2 lengths / 30 secs rest		
Warm down	4 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	32 lengths / 800 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		

	Session	Comments	WEEK FOUR
Warm up	4 lengths front crawl 4 lengths legs only 4 lengths front crawl		
Main set	At 80% effort: 4 lengths front crawl / rest 30 secs 4 lengths breaststroke / rest 30 secs 4 lengths backstroke / rest 30 secs 4 lengths fly or front crawl / rest 30 secs		
Warm down	4 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	32 lengths / 800 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		



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	Session	Comments	WEEK FIVE
Warm up	8 lengths front crawl		
Main set	Front crawl: 3 lengths easy pace & 1 length hard pace / rest 60 secs. 2 lengths easy pace & 2 lengths hard pace / rest 60 secs. 1 length easy pace & 3 lengths hard pace / rest 60 secs. 4 lengths hard pace / rest 60 secs.		
Warm down	8 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	32 lengths / 800 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		

	Session	Comments	WEEK SIX
Warm up	2 lengths front crawl 2 lengths legs only 2 lengths arms only 2 lengths front crawl		
Main set	Front crawl: 8 lengths at 80% effort focus on extending the arms to maximum stroke length. Rest 1 min 8 lengths at 80% effort focus on pulling your arm through the water		
Warm down	8 lengths easy pace mixing strokes		
Total	32 lengths / 800 metres (based on a 25 metre pool)		

To be a better swimmer there are two key aspects which you need to focus on - technique and progressive training.

1. Technique

Good technique is essential in the water and if your technique isn't great, you're probably working a lot harder than is necessary to get from A to B. Improving your technique will have a significant effect on your performance in the pool, you will learn to travel further in each movement and use less energy to complete each stroke.

These drills will help you to improve your front crawl technique:

Catch up:

This helps to develop a long stroke so you travel the furthest distance with the minimum of effort. With one arm stationary and extended forward, holding onto a kickboard, perform a stroke with the other arm. When the working arm recovers and catches up with the stationary arm, switch hands on the kickboard and repeat.

Fingertip drag:

High elbow swimming allows you to use your entire forearm and hand as a paddle rather than just your hand. As your arm moves forward after the pull, trail your fingers through the surface of the water. Focus on keeping your elbows pointed up. Your fingertips should never leave the water.

10 and 10:

The 10 and 10 drill develops a good body roll essential for the correct breathing position. Extend one arm and roll onto your side as if you were taking a breath. Kick ten times in this position and then take a stroke so that your body rolls onto the other side and your arms switch places.

One Arm Drill:

One arm drill lets you focus on building strength in both arms. Keeping one arm by your side, perform your usual stroke with the other six times and then switch arms.

2. Progressive Training

You probably wouldn't dream of running the same route and at the same speed week after week, yet for many of us, a swim means the same amount of lengths at the same steady pace. Whilst this approach is good for overall fitness, you're unlikely to see any real improvements in your performance in the pool.

This six week training plan is designed for improver swimmers who are ready to take their training to the next level. Before you begin your swim, focus on stretching the shoulders, upper back and triceps, and also the quads and glutes. Aim to complete each session three times a week.

** This training programme is intended as a guide to help you improve your swimming (It is aimed at someone who is used to training 2-3 times a week). If at any time during your training you feel unwell or have an injury you must stop and seek expert advice. Sportsister accepts no responsibility for injury or loss of life as a result of using this training programme. Above all we hope that you enjoy the programme and notice improvements*