

Swimming Tips

Swimming is the best cross training workout for runners. It'll increase your lung capacity since you can only breathe every other stroke and work all of the muscles involved with running without the pounding. You can do an all-out sprint swimming workout and recover quickly for your next run. The water also offers great "me" time. It's the most tranquil of all endurance disciplines. Put your face in the water, and everything else goes away. Before you hit the pool, know which swim style is best for runners and why a kick board is needed.

The best style of swimming for runners is freestyle. You use your hip flexors in the same manner as running. I want you to work hard in the water, but I also want you to work smart.

To start, float on your chest with your body in a straight line and face parallel to the bottom of the pool. Reach your left arm in front of you as far as possible, pull the water, and rotate your shoulder to get a high elbow. When your hand exits on the outside of your hip, it's known as the recovery phase. There should be a catch up in your stroke—meaning your left arm and shoulder should stay extended in front of you until your right arm is reentering the water from the recovery phase of the stroke. This is your glide.

Roll your head from side to side based on which arm is currently in front of your head. Rotate your hips to help drive your stroke as you would swing a baseball bat or tennis racket. This also helps elongate the body and cut through the water. Look at videos of distance swimmers, they are very rhythmic. There are no thrashing motions going on.

Another great workout in the water is to use a kick board. No swimming experience needed. Grip the edges of the board with your hands and extend it out in front of you as far as possible. Kick while trying to keep your legs as straight as you can. There will be some bend from the pressure of the water. If you purposely bend at the knee while kicking, it will create a reverse motion and you will not get anywhere.

With both forms, just like running, you'll need to build stamina. Running stamina will not help your swimming, but swimming stamina will greatly improve your running.

Start with a couple of pool lengths at a time and build on that. If you can build up to a half hour or more of straight swimming and then add intervals in, I guarantee you'll be a faster runner.