

TRI CLINIC

Drafting » Iron swim fears » Touch turns » Alternative strokes

MEET OUR EXPERTS

MARK KLEANTHOS

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Practise drafting in training to get a feel for swimming in the 'wake' of the swimmer in front

SEND US YOUR QUESTIONS...

If you have a triathlon query, send us your question and we'll try to answer it in the next available issue of **220 Triathlon**. Include as much relevant information as you can. Sadly, we cannot reply to your questions personally.

■ **Email your question to:** triclinc@220triathlon.com

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DRAFTING DILEMMA

Q How much time can you really save by drafting off another swimmer? I always swallow lots of water if I follow someone's feet and I prefer to keep to my own patch.

DAVE NICHOLLS, EMAIL

A Drafting can save you as much as 70secs in an Olympic-distance triathlon and as much as 3:15mins in a 3.8km long-distance swim.

There are many benefits to drafting in swimming, and the faster the speed of the swimmer in front the greater you'll benefit. During cycling the energy saving is exponential as it's much quicker, whereas swimming pace is obviously much slower as water is much more dense than air.

First of all you need to establish what type of swimmer you are and look for slightly faster/similar swimmers to follow. This can easily

be achieved in the warm-up just by chatting to other race starters. If you're aware of your competition beforehand then even better!

With practice you can learn to feel the 'wake' of the swimmer in front (the disturbed flow of water caused by them moving forwards), and then know the exact location of the swimmer from the feel of the bubbles/movement of them in the water. You can then choose to either draft behind or at the hip of the swimmer in front.

The first place to draft effectively is directly behind and slightly to the side of your preferred breathing side. So if you breathe to the right, get your head in line behind the swimmer's right leg. Swimming immediately behind produces around a third less drag, compared to drafting at a swimmer's hip.

The second best place to draft is on the same side as you breathe on, but with the lead swimmer on that same side. So you need to make sure that your body is

close to theirs, and inside the wake and dip that they create from their torso movements.

A common drafting mistake is tapping the lead swimmer's feet. This has a negative impact on both your performances. It distracts their rhythm, which results in their, and your, pace slowing, not to mention irritating them! They can lose concentration, go off course or worse - they slow down to let you pass.

You not only need to overcome the fear and anxiety of drafting, but you also have to make technical stroke adjustments when swimming in open water and using a wetsuit. Don't fight against the suit and avoid forcing your stroke, because if you do you'll simply fatigue very quickly. Instead use a slightly straighter swing recovery arm and combine this with drafting, so you can save as much as 15-25% of your energy.

Remember, drafting needs to be practised well and it takes a lot of getting used to! **MK**



ZONE

Q I restarted swimming three years ago, have only ever completed 1,500m open-water swims (my best time is 32 mins) and am now preparing for my first Ironman. How should I tackle training for the long swim leg? 3.8km seems very daunting! **JILL COOPER, EMAIL**

A The underlying hardship behind the swim is the length of time you'll be in the water, probably at least 85-90 mins on your current swim fitness. If this is leaving you very fatigued it's not a great way to start a day that has probably at least another 9-10hrs of racing to go. It's also worth remembering that your upper body and arms are not excluded from doing any work for the rest of the day post-swim - upper body strength is often overlooked among triathletes.

You need to build upper body endurance in your sessions as the primary way to get through the swim with less fatigue and also at a faster, sustainable pace. Focusing too much on skill is a distraction when you need to be able to endure an hour and a half of constant swimming, so you'll benefit more from just focusing on covering the 3.8km. Here's what you have to do:

■ **SET ASIDE SLOTS**

You'll need to build the length of your sessions to around 3-4km. This means devoting time and energy to getting bigger sessions completed, at the expense of some low-intensity bike/run sessions. If any session isn't helping you for Ironman it has to be lengthened, or the time has to be used elsewhere. Set aside at least two 60-90min swim session training slots per week.

■ **SWIM FRESH**

Use the timing of other sessions to ensure you're fresh for harder swims. Without a decent base of swim training you'll always see swimming as recovery time for your legs, which ultimately means bad technique and higher energy expenditure. Though long sessions in each sport are vital to build for IM, make sure you're fresh for your longest swim session.

■ **OUT IN THE OPEN**

You need to be happy with the overall fit of your wetsuit, as this will aid your swim efficiency and you'll be happier with the rigours of being in cold water. Seek out well-organised open-water swim venues and plan to get one session done every week. As you don't have to push off the wall every 25-50m in open water, you'll quickly build up upper body endurance in a real-world setting, allowing you to find your rhythm, perfect sighting and alter your stroke to suit the open-water scenario.

■ **RACE DAY READY**

Come the big day, put your suit on with plenty of time to spare so you don't rush and potentially rip it. Fuel as you walk to the start line (e.g. energy drink) and focus on that first sighting point to look out for. Swim well! **JB**

MOVING UP TO THE MIDDLE

Q I'm thinking of entering Ironman Lanzarote 70.3 in 2016. I'll be one of the slowest swimmers (as I only have use of one arm) and it's petrifying me! I currently swim 2,000m in 1:07hrs in the pool, but will I find swimming in a wetsuit easier because of the added buoyancy? **STUART WILLMORE, EMAIL**

A First of all congratulations on challenging yourself to race middle distance with only the use of one arm - highly commendable! Having worked for a number of years with paratriathletes I'm aware it takes real commitment to achieve your goals, and it's definitely doable with practice and persistence.

In short, a wetsuit will offer you more buoyancy in the water; however you may also want to look at different areas of your swimming to reduce your worries.

Make sure you practise both in open water and with others to improve your confidence, and remember you can start at the back or to the side of the other swimmers to have a more peaceful swim.

The major area to focus on will be technique. When you only have use of one arm your kick becomes more important. To improve your kick spend more time kicking in training (both with fins and



without), and find videos of swimmers who have a good kick and try to emulate their technique.

In the upper body, your rotation becomes a lot more important. Good core strength will allow you to rotate more evenly to both sides and this rotation should originate in your hips, keeping your stroke more even and balanced (I've seen a number of single-arm athletes look as balanced in the water as elites). To work on this keep your fins on and practise rotating to both sides with arms by your side.

Finally, I'd encourage you to experiment swimming with your non-useable arm by your side both strapped and unstrapped. If you find that you have more control and balance with your arm strapped to your side then you could try this under your wetsuit. However, if you're able to rotate your arm then it's often better to do this even if you have no power, as it helps maintain balance.

Keep up the good work and I hope all goes well on your middle-distance debut! **AB**

QUICK Q&A

I keep miscounting my lengths, how do I solve this?

EDWARD LYONS, EMAIL

Unless you invest in a swim GPS watch (and pause to look at the screen whenever you lose count) the only way is practice. Splitting your swim into 100m sections or performing shorter sets can help. Losing count usually happens when you switch off, so stay focused and make every session 'quality'.

Do I need to use specific open-water goggles?

MARTIN MCDONALD, EMAIL

If you're new to OW or lack confidence then the increased peripheral vision of OW-specific goggles may appeal. However, pool goggles have many similar features anyway, so if you prefer the fit of a pool goggle, just make sure to go for light/clear lenses for a more enjoyable swim.

Is a swimskin really necessary in non-wetsuit swims?

MEGAN DAVIES, EMAIL

A swimskin is a specialised piece of kit for warm water swims, and costs upwards of £150 - so if you're UK-based you'll almost never get to use it! It's said you could save up to 5secs per 100m wearing a swimskin, so if you're seriously competitive and/or you have races abroad planned it may be worth investing.

YOU SPIN ME RIGHT ROUND

Q Is there actually any point in learning to do flashy tumble turns in the pool? Lots of triathletes in my club spend ages practising turns, but surely this has no benefit for open-water swimming?

JONATHAN HOWLEY, EMAIL

A Many swimmers see the tumble turn as what separates competitive swimmers from the recreational. However, a poorly executed turn can of course slow you down!

The benefits of a (good) tumble turn are that you can bounce off the walls at speed, maintaining momentum. This encourages you to use your core to get away quickly. This can transfer to open-water turns, where you need to get tight around the buoys rather than swimming in a wide arc. But this skill can be practised just as well with a good touch turn.

To perform a good touch turn, swim into and off the wall in a straight line without stopping. Most swimmers swim in down one side, stop, move across the lane, and then push off in a big U-shape. Instead, aim for the middle of the lane in your final couple of metres, and push off in a V-shape. This will invariably take a couple of seconds off your 100m splits.

My favourite drill for learning turns is to lie on your side as if to do side kick, kicking gently and sculling to keep you in place. Tuck your knees up close to your chest and push them out toward your outstretched hand. If you do this sharply enough and tuck up quickly, you should stay afloat and on the spot. You can then try this against a wall, keeping both arms outstretched and hopefully not dragging yourself into the wall! It's the skill of tucking your knees into your chest quickly that will help you swim tight to OW turn buoys - or just maintain your momentum effectively in the pool. **JW**





↑ Mixing up your swim stroke in training will do your overall race-swim performance no end of good

I'm curious as to why us triathletes are told to do backstroke and breaststroke in training when they aren't relevant to our races. Shouldn't we just stick to the task at hand?

STUART BROOKES, EMAIL

FROM THE COACH
TERRY LAUGHLIN
 is a renowned swim coach and the pioneer of Total Immersion Swimming



A This question made me recall a Total Immersion workshop in Atlanta 20 years ago. Mike Pigg, one of the most successful standard-distance triathletes pre-Olympics, was participating. One comment of Mike's that stood out was: "When I'm in the pool I train like a swimmer, not a triathlete."

Likewise, I'd encourage any triathlete to experiment with strokes other than freestyle:

- Running and cycling have only one basic form. Swimming has four distinct forms, representing two strikingly different ways to move through the water. In freestyle and backstroke you move arms and legs alternately, rotating around the head-spine line, travelling on the surface. In butterfly and breaststroke you move arms and legs simultaneously, rotating around a hip-to-hip axis, and travel mostly below the surface.

- These differing ways of moving through water add something distinct to your 'water sense,' which is underdeveloped in late-starting swimmers. It's similar to running or cycling a new course. When you run the same course every day, you become so adapted to it you switch to autopilot. Running a new course forces you to adapt your approach, and the same goes for swimming.

- You have less chance of injury by avoiding lots of repetitive movement - especially if you feel rough or ragged in freestyle, or have experienced tender shoulders.

- Your attitude toward swimming will be refreshed, if you've felt a bit bored with 'going in circles.'

- As for fitting different strokes into training, I'd recommend the last two to three months of the year, after the tri season has ended. It adds a refreshing change of pace, increases water awareness, and will maintain your fitness during the off-season. **TL**

FROM THE ATHLETE
LUCY HALL
 is a pro ITU triathlete and one of the fastest swimmers in the sport



A I've always been a firm believer in incorporating a medley of strokes into my swim training. Perhaps because I come from a swimming club background, it just doesn't seem natural to just do front crawl for a whole session. There are three reasons why I would suggest triathletes should use other strokes, (butterfly, backstroke and breast-stroke as well as front crawl) during training:

- It reinforces flexibility and strength in the upper body and can improve your overall cardiovascular ability. When completing the swim leg in a triathlon, the start is always an explosive effort. Then you have to maintain your pace, which isn't what you'd typically do in a standard swimming race. Medley swimming is great for simulating that 'end of swim fatigue' that affects us all in races as it's quite

strenuous. I believe it can condition your body to maintain a stronger pace in your swimming overall.

- Using all four strokes increases your 'feel for the water'. You become more aware of your own buoyancy, balance and body position by varying the strokes you do. I'm constantly tweaking my hand entry and catch in training to achieve a more efficient stroke.

- Finally, (and anyone who does multiple pool swims a week will probably agree) endurance sets can become mundane sometimes! Introducing a medley section into a swim gives that element of spontaneity to the session and makes it more interesting.

The great thing about medley is that you can adapt drills to improve technique. For example, if you're struggling with butterfly, you can break it down into 4 x 50m fly leg kick on your back to get the rhythm before progressing to 8 x 25m single-arm butterfly on your front, with the kick setting the rhythm for you. **LH**

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IMAGE COLIN BALDWIN