backstroke

Backstroke Technique Made Easy

backstroke swimming stroke broken down and explained

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backstroke swimming technique

This is the most efficient stroke swum on the back and is the third fastest of all swimming strokes. The majority of the power is produced by the alternating arm technique and its horizontal streamlined body position gives it its efficiency. Therefore this is the preferred stroke in competitive races swum on the back.

The nature of floating on the back, face up (supine) can be a calming and relaxing feeling. Also the face is clear of the water, allowing easy breathing and little water splashes onto the face. On the other hand it can be counter productive at first, as it can give a feeling of disorientation and unease, as the person is facing upwards and therefore unaware of their surroundings. The supine body position is flat and horizontal, with ears slightly below the water surface.

The legs kick in an alternating action, continuously up and down to help balance the action of the arms. This stroke has two different arm actions: the which is the most efficient, and the straight arm pull, which is the easiest to learn. Therefore the straight arm pull is best for beginners.

Breathing should be in time with recovery of each arm, breathing in with one arm recovery and out with the other. Ideally there should be 6 leg kicks to one arm cycle. This stroke timing may vary according to the swimmer’s level of coordination.

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**body position**

The supine body position for this stroke is flat and horizontal, with ears slightly below the water surface.

Good floaters will find this position relaxing and relatively easy, whereas poor floaters will find it difficult to achieve a comfortable head position.

![Body position remains horizontal and relaxed](image)

The head remains still throughout the stroke with the eyes looking slightly down the body at a point the swimmer is swimming away from.

The head position is important because a raised head makes it more difficult to keep the hips raised in the correct position which leads to a sitting type position in the water.

![Direction of travel](image)

Water flow

The hips and shoulders remain at or near the water surface but roll with the stroke. The legs and feet should be extended and remain together to maximise efficiency, with knees remaining below the water surface.

**legs**

During this stroke the legs kick in an alternating action, continuously up and down to help balance the action of the arms.

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The amount of propulsion generated from the kick will depend on the size of the feet, ankle mobility and strength of the legs.

The knee should bend slightly and then straighten as the leg kicks upwards. Toes should kick to create a small splash but not break the water surface.

During specific leg practices the legs kick in a vertical plane. However, the arm action causes the body to roll making the legs kick part sideways, part vertical and partly to the other side.

**arms**

There are two possible arm actions for this stroke. The bent arm pull, which is more effective because it is faster and has greater propulsion, and the straight arm pull used in more recreational backstroke.

- **straight arm pull**

**entry**

The arm should be straight and as inline with the shoulder as possible. Hand should be turned with palm facing outwards and little finger entering the water first.

**propulsive phase**

The arm sweeps through the water in a semi-circle, pulling with force just under the water surface, pulling to the outside of the thigh.
**recovery**
The thumb or the back of the hand should exit the water first. The shoulders roll again with the shoulder of the recovering arm rolling upwards. The arm rotates through 180 degrees over the shoulder. The palm is turned outwards during recovery to ensure that the hand enters the water little finger first.

- **bent arm pull**

As the arm pulls through to completion, the overall path should follow an ‘S’ shape.

**entry**
The entry is the same as the straight arm pull, with the little finger entering first, the palm facing out and the arm close to the shoulder line.

**downward sweep**
The palm should always face the direction of travel. The shoulders roll and the elbow bends slightly as the arm sweeps downwards and outwards.

**upwards sweep**
As the hand sweeps inline with the shoulder, the palm changes pitch to sweep upwards and inwards. The elbow should then bend to 90 degrees and point to the pool floor.

**second downward sweep**
The arm action then sweeps inwards towards the thigh and the palm faces downwards. The bent arm action is completed with the arm fully extended and the hand pushing downwards to counter balance the shoulder roll.

**recovery**
The thumb or the back of the hand should exit the water first. The shoulders roll again with the shoulder of the recovering arm rolling upwards. The arm rotates through 180 degrees over the shoulder. The palm is turned outwards during recovery to ensure that the hand enters the water little finger first.

**breathing**

Breathing during this stroke should be relaxed and easy, due to the supine body position and face being out of the water throughout the stroke. Most swimmers are neither aware of way in which they breathe, nor the pattern of breathing or point at which a breath is taken.

Breathing should be in time with recovery of each arm, breathing in with one arm recovery and out with the other. This encourages a breath to be taken at regular intervals.

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A regular breathing pattern should be encouraged to prevent breath holding, particularly in beginners.

**timing**

The timing and coordination of the arms and legs develops with practice.

Ideally there should be 6 leg kicks to one arm cycle. The opposite leg kicks downwards at the beginning of each arm pull. This helps to balance the body. This may vary according to the swimmer’s level of coordination.

Arm action should be continuous. i.e. when one arm enters and begins to pull, the other should begin its recovery phase.

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full stroke overview

Body position remains level

Alternating leg kick remains at the water surface

Arm action is continuous and alternating

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The Complete Guide to Swimming Backstroke

Everything you’ve read in this book **PLUS** 20 of the best exercises to fine tune your backstroke technique

The Complete Guide to Swimming Backstroke is the perfect quick-fix for anyone wanting an easy to follow, concise and simplistic guide book. For the complete beginner, this book helps to learn and understand the basic stroke, and for the established swimmer to adjust and improve. The 20 fully illustrated exercises contained in this book cover all aspects of the stroke and can help any beginner to learn and practice, and any swimmer to eliminate bad habits and fine-tune their backstroke.

“A simple, yet highly detailed guide to helping anyone learn, improve and enhance their backstroke technique in easy simplistic steps”

Mark Young – author

Mark Young is a well established swimming instructor with over twenty years experience of teaching thousands of adults and children to swim. He has taught countless beginners from scratch and turned many of average ability into advanced swimmers. This book draws on his experiences and countless successes to put together this simplistic methodical approach to mastering backstroke swimming technique.

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Example swimming exercise

The page layout for each exercise follows the same format, keeping all relevant information on one page. The aims, technical focuses and key points are all listed with a photograph and graphical diagram of the exercise.

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BACKSTROKE: Body Position

Push and glide holding a float

Aim: to gain confidence and move through the water in a supine position. Holding a float gives added security to the nervous or weak swimmer whilst helping to maintain correct body position.

Technical Focus
- Overall body should be horizontal and streamlined
- Head remains still
- Eyes looking upwards
- Hips must be close to the surface
- Legs must be together

Key Actions
- Relax
- Keep your head back and chin up
- Push your tummy up to the surface
- Look up to the ceiling
- Keep your head still
- Push off like a rocket

Body position remains level

Direction of travel

Float can be placed on the chest or behind the head as in the photos above.

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Aim: to develop an alternating leg kick action.
The swimmers is positioned sitting on the pool side with feet in the water. Ideal for the nervous beginner to get accustomed to the ‘feel’ of the water.

**Technical Focus**
- Kick comes from the hips
- Toes are pointed
- Legs are together
- Slight knee bend
- Ankles are relaxed

**Key Actions**
- Point your toes like a ballerina
- Kick from your hips
- Kick with floppy feet
- Keep your legs together
- Make your legs as long as possible

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