

# Backstroke

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Adjusting the body position to minimize drag is more important than how your hands and arms pull through the water. If you get your body balanced and streamlined, then rotate your body through the water, you will get faster even if you have a flawed stroke. Think of your hips as the *engine* that makes your backstroke go.

## BODY POSITION

Your chest should be just above the water surface and your hips should be just below the water surface. Keep your head back in a streamline position with your body. The head should not move. Let the head act as a fulcrum from which the body roll occurs. *Body roll* is critical! The body must roll nearly 45 degrees to allow for the shoulder to recover above the water and for the armstroke to develop the leverage needed to obtain propulsion.

## ARM ENTRY

Your arms should be fully extended with the palm facing out and the little finger entering first. Imagine that your hands are the arms of a clock. Your hands should enter at 11:00 and 1:00. Overreaching towards the 12:00 position (centerline) will cause the hips to follow and create a “snake” action in the water. Under reaching, entering before 11:00 and 1:00 will cause a lack of propulsion. Smashing and/or slapping the hands into the water will cause wave drag.

## UNDERWATER STROKE

After the hand enters the water the swimmer must dig down under their bodies – not out to the side. Your aim is to get your hand between the bottom of the pool and yourself. Be careful not to push straight to the bottom. This will disrupt your body alignment and cause the body to bounce. Instead, bend the elbow immediately upon entry. A common mistake is for swimmers to lead with their elbows. The elbow should not travel in advance of the hand. Flex the elbow 90 degrees.

## RECOVERY

At the end of the underwater stroke, the palm should be facing in, the arm should be extended and the thumb exits the water first. **Relax** the hand so it gets some rest.

The recovery is made by lifting the shoulder then the hand from the water. Lifting the hand first will cause the shoulder to submerge.

## KICK

The backstroke kick is more propulsive to the stroke than freestyle. The mechanics are similar to the freestyle flutter kick. The biggest difference is there should be more leg flex on the upbeat. Do not “bicycle” and do not kick too deep. Keep legs extended toes turned in. The kick should be just below the surface. The feet should not break the surface. The water should *boil* if you’re kicking just below the surface. Because of the body roll, backstroke kicking is really diagonal kicking.

## ETC., ETC.

It is imperative that when swimming backstroke, you know the number of strokes from the flags to the wall.

## DRILLS

- One arm swimming. Roll the body until the shoulder opposite the stroking arm pops out of the water.
- Swim one arm backstroke up against the wall. (*Forces swimmer to pull under their bodies*).
- Lateral kicking. Bodies should be rotated toward the arm that is extended.
- Swimming backstroke with a donut on your forehead. (*Work on keeping your head stationary*).
- Kick-Roll (*Develop body roll*).
- Saluting drill. When the arm is directly above the body, bending at the elbow, touch the opposite shoulder. (*Develop the recovery directly over the body as opposed to out side the body*).
- 10-Count drill. Arm recovery to a slow 10 count.
- Swimming World cover drill. Exaggerate an arm recovery (half way) then relax while the other arm goes through a full recovery. Do this for 3 cycles. (*Work on high shoulder recovery into their chin*).
- Half way through the arm recovery, stop and stare at hand overhead.
- Half way through the arm recovery, stop and shake the hand overhead. (*Helps develop relaxation*).