

## BREASTSTROKE

Probably the most difficult of all strokes to master is the breaststroke. This is because the motions of the arm stroke and Kick are circular in motion, rather than linear in motion as it is with the other three competitive strokes. Correct timing is essential to a good breaststroke as is strength and flexibility.

Breaststroke can be divided up into 4 distinct phases, which consists of the out sweep, in sweep, breathing phase, and lunge, extension, or recovery phase. The difficulty of the stroke arises from the fact that the arms and hands must work simultaneously with the legs and feet. As you progress through the drills, work at understanding what phase of the stroke the drill is aimed to perfect.

The stroke is begun at the fully extended prone position. Each successive stroke should begin at the same place. While the position is not held for any measurable time, it is vitally important to keep the stroke long and the body near the surface at this point of the stroke. As the stroke begins, the feet remain outstretched and together. The chest is pushed slightly down and forward as the hands separate and begin the out sweep. The head is kept in the water at this phase of the stroke. The arms continue their out sweep with straight elbows until they are at approximately 60 degrees to the shoulder line. The hips should be at the surface, the shoulders and chest slightly down under the surface, and the palms of the hands pitched outward.

The next phase the stroke enters is the in sweep. This is accomplished by sweeping the hands downward and slightly backward, pitching the hands back towards the torso in an effort to efficiently grab the water. The swimmer should imagine that they are sweeping out the inside of a very large salad bowl. As the downward sweep begins, the chest and head will begin to rise naturally and the hips will begin to fall to counter act the weight of the chest and head going up. The swimmer should exhale during this phase of the stroke. As the stroke comes back towards the torso, take care not to let the elbows come back next to the rib cage. This will cause the timing to be off because the arms will have to extend the extra distance from being too far behind the shoulders. Exhaling during this phase will allow the swimmer to only inhale during the breathing phase, thus, making that phase much quicker. The feet should be drawn up behind the hips with a sharp knee bend and a slight hip bend. Once the feet have reached the hips, or close to them, the toes should be pointed outward towards the sides of the pool.

The quickest phase of the stroke is the breathing phase. The breathing phase takes place as the hands finish their inward sweep. As the hands complete the sweep, the head will naturally be pushed out of the water where the swimmer inhales and begins to “fall” back into the water with a forward motion. **Care should be taken by the swimmer not to look up** during this phase. The swimmer should keep his/her eyes focused on a point about 5 feet in front of the hands. Looking up will cause the swimmer to drop the hips too far and thus not allow the hips to reach the surface on the next stroke.

Finally, it is very important to proper stroke mechanics that the swimmer breathes on every stroke cycle. The final phase of the stroke is the lunge, recovery, or extension phase. This phase needs to have a very strong kick to counter act the force of the hands going forward through the water. The hands going forward will produce resistance. In order for the swimmer to move forward the thrust from the feet must be stronger than the resistance being generated from the hands. For this reason, the hands must be close together with the fingers pointed towards the far end of the pool, not the bottom of the pool. As the hands quickly shoot to full extension, the chest will again begin to drop as the hips rise. The feet, meanwhile, will kick back, grabbing the water with the bottom of the feet. The knees should be kept inside the line of the feet and the knees should go no wider than the width of the swimmers hips. At the completion of the kick, the feet should go all the way to full extension with the toes pointed and the feet together. Many swimmers do not “finish” the kick. Rather, they let the feet drift together at the end of the kick. This loses much of the propulsive force of the feet. It is very important that the swimmer understands that finishing the kick will produce a much stronger and more efficient kick.

## BREASTSTROKE ARM DRILLS

**Seahorse Drill:** This drill is done in deep water. The swimmer begins vertical as he goes through the stroke. Stroking is done as a regular breaststroke would be, and the legs drag low behind the swimmers. As the swimmer strokes, she should be thinking of “popping the bubble” with her hands at the end of the in sweep by bringing the hands in very fast.

**Straight Elbow-Wrist Only:** This drill is done to emphasize the initial catch position of the hands. The swimmer will kick at the usual time, but instead of full stroking, the swimmers will merely circle down and out with his/her hands and then return to the starting point on the kick. It is important to keep the elbows straight and extended and at the same time, maintain the timing of the stroke. Work at extending the body.

**Half Stroke Drill:** This drill is similar to the straight elbow, wrist only drill. The swimmer swims a normal breaststroke, but only goes through half of the arm stroke rotation before resuming the stretched position at the front. This is a good drill for swimmers who have a tendency to over pull and bring their elbows back too far. It should be done in moderate distances so the swimmer will do the drill fresh and not tired.

**Heads Up Stroking with Pull Buoys:** This drill is done by stroking with a pull buoy or kick board held between the legs. It will also help to develop a natural dolphin action in the stroke. The arms should initially press down and out and then sweep inward to “pop the bubble.” It is important to remember that the stroke must accelerate from start to finish. The legs should be extended behind the swimmer with the knees straight and together, and the toes pointed.

**Life-saving buoy drill:** This is a rather unorthodox drill, but one that will serve a very useful purpose. The swimmer takes a lifesaving tube and puts it under their arms. The swimmer then swims breaststroke with the buoy held under the arm pits. This will keep the arms from going too far back and keep the stroke out in front of the swimmer where it belongs.

## BREASTSTROKE KICKING DRILLS

**Board Kicks:** These kicks are done with a kick board. These are probably the most common of all kicks. The board may be held at the top and the swimmer will kick with his/her head out, or if the swimmer should work on timing, the board may be held at the back and the drill could be done with the face in the water. In either case, the emphasis of this drill should be placed on the correct starting point of the feet. One of the most common reasons for disqualifications of the stroke is from a scissors kick. The drill helps to correct that problem.

The hands are held on the board and the heels of the feet are brought up to the buttocks. The toes then turn out towards the side of the pool and the backward thrust begins. The feet should try to “grab” the water with the bottom of the feet and push it behind the swimmer. Do not frog kick by having the knees wider than the feet! As the feet accelerate back they should also be pushing slightly down, the toes should point at the end of the kick and the feet should be together. In no other stroke is the kick as important as it is in breaststroke. Work to get the kick as correct and efficient as possible.

**Wall kicks:** This drill is used for swimmers who tend to have too sharp an angle at the hips. The drill is performed in deep water. The swimmer should put their chest on the wall of the deep end with their chin and face out of the pool. The swimmer then vertical kicks against the wall. If the swimmer hits his/her knees on the side of the pool, then the angle at the hips is too steep or acute. The swimmer will naturally begin to bend more at the knees rather than at the hips. Care should be taken by the swimmer not to bang their chin on the side of the pool.

**Kick on back:** In this drill, the swimmer is on his/her back in streamlined position. He/she then kicks breaststroke with the hands held in the streamlined position. The swimmer should watch to make sure the knees do not break the surface and that the feet finish the kick by having the toes break the surface of the

water with the feet together and the toes pointed. This is a good drill to determine how much propulsion the swimmer gets out of each kick by gliding after each kick. *This is not a drill to be performed for speed.*

**Ankle touches:** In this drill, the hands are held at the side of the body and close to the hips. As the feet come back to set up for the kick, a breath is taken and the fingertips touch the ankles. The kick is accelerated down and back as the head goes back into the water. The swimmer should try for an extended glide in this portion. By trying for the extended glide, the swimmer is forced to be efficient in his/her kick. In short, the drill is as follows: Recover for the kick, touch the ankles with the finger tips, set the feet, accelerate the kick, finish out and glide, then repeat.

**Ankle touches on back:** This drill is the same drill as above except on the back. The kick should be completed with the toes straight, together, and just at the surface line.

**2 Kicks down/ 1 stroke up:** This drill is done by starting in streamlined position, 2 kicks and glides underwater, one stroke and kick above the water, and then go under and repeat. This drill will emphasize the strong and efficient kick and the streamlined position at the end of the kick. This drill also helps promote timing and correct body position.

**Kick only - no board:** This drill is done by locking the thumbs together and kicking as if the swimmer had a board. The elbows should be kept straight. The drill will promote correct streamline position, stronger and more efficient kicks, and correct timing. A variation to this drill is called the "slide and glide." In this variation, as the swimmer surfaces for his/her breath, the shoulders are pulled back and high. The breath is taken and the swimmer will begin to fall back into the water. At this point, the swimmer kicks and glides.

## BREASTSTROKE TIMING DRILLS

**Rope drill:** This is a fun drill for the swimmers and emphasizes going under on the lunge forward. The swimmer goes to the side of the pool and does breaststroke coming up for a breath in between the ropes as they swim to the other side. The swimmer must go under on the lunge or they will not get under the ropes.

**Seven stroke drill:** The stretch and glide of the breaststroke is very important. This drill promotes the stretch and glide of the breaststroke, and correct and streamlined body position. Typically, the swimmer is instructed that he/she has seven strokes to get to the other end. The swimmer glides, pulls, kicks, and stretches no more than seven times for 1 length (25 yards). Any number of strokes can be used, although seven is ideal for high school swimmers over 25 yards. The stretch cannot be over stressed.

**2 - 1 Dolphin action:** This drill is a timing drill meant to promote the dolphin action in the breaststroke. The swimmer strokes with the arms normally, but with the kick, the swimmer does two strokes with a dolphin kick and then one stroke with a breaststroke kick, and then repeats. This drill promotes the correct dolphin action for the breaststroke.

**Heads Up - Flutter kick with fins:** This drill is done with fins or zoomers on the feet. The swimmers do a breaststroke arm actions with a flutter or freestyle kick. This drill will promote the proper shoulder lift and forward roll and will develop stronger legs. The swimmer is forced to stretch and think about what his/her arms have to do. The head is held out of the water throughout the drill.

**Flipper dolphin kick:** This drill is also done with fins or zoomers. The swimmers perform a breaststroke arm pull with a butterfly dolphin kick. This will promote correct body position, correct stretching and streamlining, and a natural kick and not a forced kick.

**Two pulls out:** If swimmers have trouble staying down under water off the starts and turns for one pull and one kick, the two pulls out drill is a good drill to use. The swimmers do two pulls and two kicks out of the turns and starts. It should be explained to the novice swimmer that this is only a drill and cannot be done during a race.