

Swimming SOS

If you've decided to take the plunge and enter a triathlon but your swimming is more 'Eddie the Eel' than Kieran Perkins, Wayne Goldsmith has put this handy beginner's guide together to ensure you swim rather than sink when you inevitably have to throw yourself in the deep end.

Words: Wayne Goldsmith | Images: Thinkstock

It's Saturday afternoon and you find yourself sitting alone on the lounge, eating potato chips, drinking soft drinks and flicking through the channels to find something interesting to watch on TV.

Re-runs of *Everybody Loves Raymond* are on one channel. Click. The TV shopping network is selling super-amazing space-age turbo-charged vacuum cleaners on another. Click. A 1950s war movie that you've already seen 37 times is on another. Click. Then something catches your eye and captures your imagination...a splash of ocean, a flash of flying pedals and a big dash of lycra...a triathlon. You think, 'That's for me – I could do that.'

So you Google 'triathlon', you check out what Wikipedia says about the sport and you search YouTube feverishly looking for articles, information and ideas about triathlon – seeking out the essential tips and tricks that can help you shift from being connected to the television to being committed to a triathlon training program.

You take stock. "Running: mmmmm. I can do that. I played footy at school and I still jog every so often. Cycling: yep, I can do that. I've got a bike that I ride every so often that'll do the job. Swimming: ah,

– there's a problem. I hate swimming and I can't swim a lap without feeling like I am going to drown."

Undaunted, you head down to the local pool, buy some shiny new goggles at the pool shop and jump in the water to commence training. OK, now what?

What should the first lap of swim training look like?

When it comes to learning anything new, remember that there's always a first time for everyone. The Olympic gold medallist for 1500-metre freestyle had to swim their first lap at some time. So too did the winners of every Ironman triathlon ever held.

Before you push off for that first lap, before you take that first stroke, think about this one word; it is a word that will have a bigger impact and a more positive influence on your swimming training and triathlon career than any other – relax.

When little kids come to the pool for swimming lessons it is common for the learn-to-swim teachers to gather all the kids together in shallow, warm water, have them hold hands and then teach them to sing silly swimming songs.



They sing *Pop Goes the Weasel* and all the kids ‘pop’ up out of the water at the appropriate time.

They sing *Ring a Ring o’ Rosie* and they all ‘fall down’ when the song tells them to.

They all sit on the pool edge singing ‘Humpty Dumpty’ and they have a ‘great fall’ into the shallow water.

Why this emphasis on singing and having fun and laughter in these early stages of swimming skills development? Simple: It teaches kids from a very early age to relax and to enjoy being in and around water.

Before you push off for that first lap of swimming, aim to stay relaxed and determined to enjoy every moment of your swimming training. Endurance training? Relax. Sprinting? Relax. Kick sets? Relax.

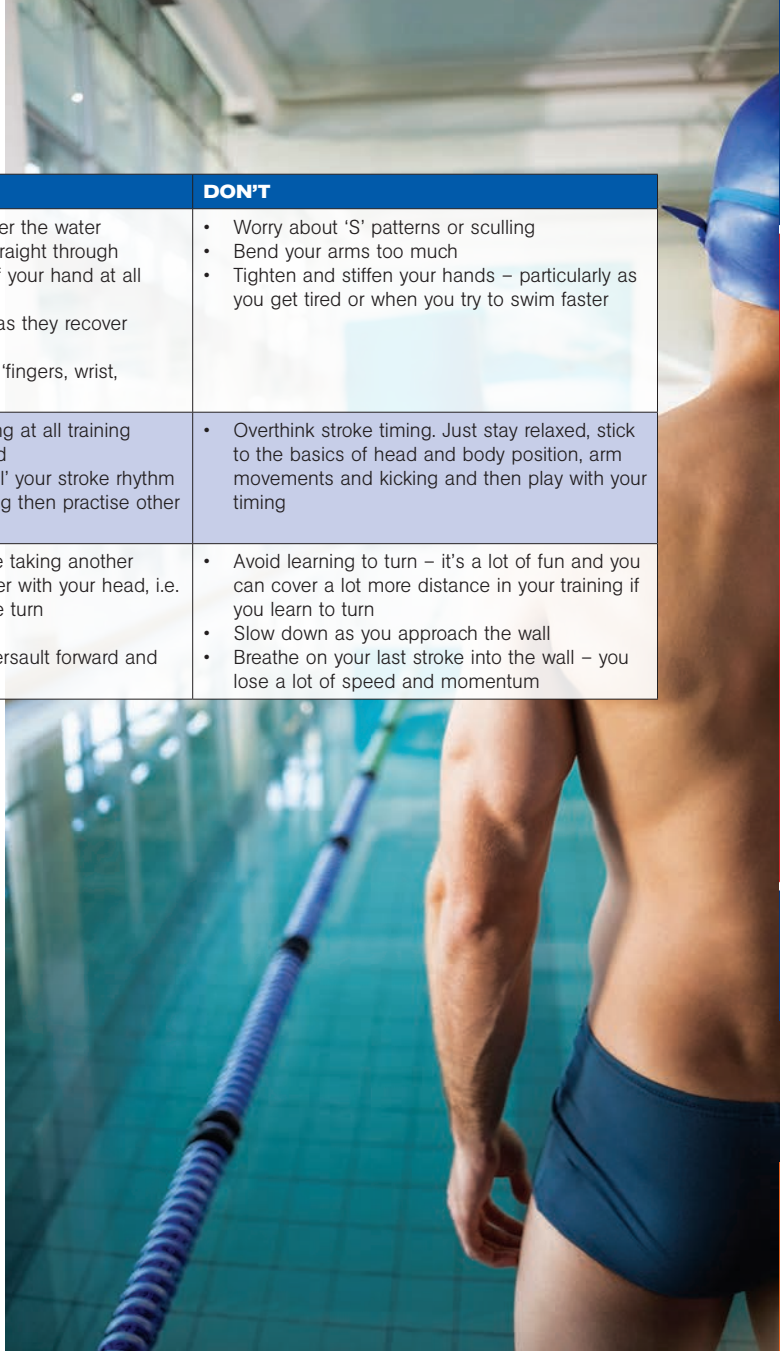
No matter what type of training you are doing, no matter what your swimming and triathlon goals may be, no matter what level of competition you are preparing for, relaxation in the water is the most basic, the most fundamental and the most important swimming principle you will ever learn. You will be amazed at what a difference this one word and principle will make to your swimming.

Swimming for triathlon – let’s go BTB (back to basics)

Let’s look at the magnificent seven: the seven basic swimming skills that are at the core of all great triathlon performances and the do’s and don’ts that will guide you to faster swimming.

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SWIMMING BTB	DO	DON'T
Breathing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inhale deeply and normally every breath Exhale completely and forcefully underwater every breath Exhale through your nose and mouth – particularly when turning Leave one goggle, the corner of your mouth and one ear in the water when you turn your head to breathe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold your breath Have your face in the water without air in your lungs Take shallow breaths
Kicking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep your feet soft and loose and ‘floppy’ Kick with long, loose, relaxed legs Feel the water ‘bubbling’ around your toes on the surface of the water when you kick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep your legs tight and stiff Bend your knees too much Forcefully point your toes Try harder when aiming to kick faster: i.e. aim to keep your legs loose, relaxed and soft at all speeds.
Head position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at the bottom of the pool or just slightly ahead of you Keep your head in a neutral position, i.e. as if you were walking down the street Keep your head movements very small – particularly when you turn your head to breathe 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move your head too much Lift your head too often Look too far ahead
Body Position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep your body, hips and neck in the same line as your head – i.e. a neutral, natural ‘walking’ position Rotate through the central axis of your body Aim for evenness and symmetry – be the same left to right and up and down. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Move from side to side Allow your hips to drop low in the water Move up and down – i.e. ‘bobbing’ in the water



SWIMMING BTB	DO	DON'T
Catch and arm stroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep your hands soft and relaxed as you enter the water • Bend your elbow slightly and pull your arm straight through • Feel the pressure of the water on the palm of your hand at all times • Keep your hands and arms soft and relaxed as they recover forward • Remember that your arms should maintain a 'fingers, wrist, elbows movement throughout the stroke 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worry about 'S' patterns or sculling • Bend your arms too much • Tighten and stiffen your hands – particularly as you get tired or when you try to swim faster
Timing and rhythm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practise maintaining a steady, controlled timing at all training sessions – particularly as you start to get tired • Routinely count your strokes and learn to 'feel' your stroke rhythm • Start with a basic 'catch-up'-style stroke timing then practise other stroke timings as you progress and improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overthink stroke timing. Just stay relaxed, stick to the basics of head and body position, arm movements and kicking and then play with your timing
Turns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach your arm towards the wall as if you are taking another stroke then follow your hand through the water with your head, i.e. put your chin on your chest to commence the turn • Keep your knees together • Put your heels on your backside as you somersault forward and flip over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid learning to turn – it's a lot of fun and you can cover a lot more distance in your training if you learn to turn • Slow down as you approach the wall • Breathe on your last stroke into the wall – you lose a lot of speed and momentum

Summary

1 Anyone can do a triathlon. It's not about talent. It's not about age. It's not about physical condition. Anyone can do a triathlon. It just depends on how committed you are.

2 Too many people never finish a triathlon because they never, ever start one. We know that one of the main reasons most people don't start a triathlon-training program is that they are daunted by the prospect of doing the swim.

3 You don't have to be great to start but you have to start to be great. It all begins with those first few strokes in the pool: get moving to get moving.

4 Keep it very simple. Swimming is not as technical as most people think. It's about sticking to the basics – and regularly practising the fundamentals of effective, efficient swimming: a normal head and body position, relaxed, controlled breathing, simple and relatively straight arm movements and a constant, steady rhythmic kick. 🏊‍♂️



Wayne Goldsmith is a triathlon coach who has worked with both Triathlon Australia and Swimming Australia

*“Swimming should be easy-
almost effortless...”*

Learn how with
Wayne Goldsmith

- Swimming for Triathlon specialist.
- Individualised coaching for triathletes of all ages.
- Come and swim with us at our new **GOLD COAST TRAINING CENTRE** at Trinity Lutheran College, Ashmore Road, Ashmore.

Triathlon Swimming Squad Starts in April 2014



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