Drills That Will Help You Build Your Lung Strength and Improve Your Freestyle Breathing Pattern

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September 20, 2021

Try these two drills to help with your freestyle

Swimming is considered more difficult to learn than other endurance sports because of the complications associated with being in the water. The most obvious one is the need to breathe air in an aquatic environment.

Effective and efficient breathing patterns are crucial to master in order to become a good swimmer. A breathing pattern is best described as your rhythm related to how often you take a breath while you're swimming. The optimal freestyle breathing pattern often depends on the distance you're going to be swimming.

When you're swimming, your muscles use oxygen to function and propel you forward with every stroke. The faster you swim, the more oxygen your muscles need, so establishing a breathing pattern is important.

In short sprint races, such as the 100 freestyle, your body will need substantially more oxygen since you'll be swimming at an all-out effort. In these shorter races, you tend to kick a lot faster as well, and your leg muscles are large and require a lot of oxygen to function efficiently.

Freestylers either breathe just to one side or breathe to both sides, which is called bilateral breathing. Both have advantages depending on your previous swimming experience and where you're racing.

Regardless of the type of breathing pattern you choose, performing breathing pattern drills will help you breathe more efficiently, thereby improving your lung capacity. Breathing pattern drills to consider implementing into your swim workouts include what I'll call "new-school" hypoxic drills and "old-school" hypoxic drills.

To perform the new-school hypoxic drill, swim regular freestyle but only take a breath when you absolutely must. This could be every other stroke or once per length. The key here is to make sure you don't hold your breath, which can be dangerous. Exhale as you swim, letting air out slowly as if you're humming. This drill improves lung capacity over time because you're swimming as far as you can prior to taking a breath. It's best to start using new-school hypoxic sets in 50s or 100s, building up the distance as you become more comfortable with the drill.

To perform the old-school hypoxic drill, swim regular freestyle but take a breath on a set pattern, such as every three or six strokes. If you're a single-side breather, you'll choose an even number. Bilateral breathers will choose an odd number of strokes. As you swim, focus on keeping a steady pace and breathing on your assigned number of strokes. As with the new-school hypoxic drill, start the old-school hypoxic drill in sets of 50s or 100s, building up the distance as you get more comfortable with the drill. (Again, don't hold your breath will performing this drill. Doing so can be dangerous. Instead, release your air underwater during the time between breaths.)

You can also consider building the breathing pattern by 25s or 50s such that you decrease the quantity of breaths you take. For example, if you swim a 200 doing the old-school hypoxic drill, you can try breathing every four strokes the first 50, every six strokes the second 50, every eight strokes the third 50, and every ten strokes the last 50. Doing so will also help increase your lung capacity over time.