

# SWIM

THE WORLD'S FOREMOST AUTHORITY ON ADULT SWIMMING

SWIM was started by Kim Hansen in 1984. It became the official magazine of United States Masters Swimming in 1992. Today the title lives as a section in Swimming World Magazine and can be downloaded separately.



## the POOL'S EDGE

MOTIVATION ■ TECHNIQUE ■ TRAINING IDEAS ■ EQUIPMENT USAGE

### BACKSTROKE AS EASY AS 1-2-3

BY KARLYN PIPES-NEILSEN

There are many benefits to swimming backstroke—it opens up the chest, the shoulders can “unwind,” and you can breathe almost anytime you want. Backstroke is also great for recovery.

However, many swimmers have a love/hate relationship with backstroke. If you fall into the “hate” category, then perhaps it's time to re-evaluate your current technique to see if there is room for improvement.

The common mistakes—and their effects—are:

- Overreaching = wiggle down the pool
- Pulling with a straight arm = no “catch”
- Hand getting stuck at the thigh = lose momentum
- Poor head position = hips drop
- Kicking too big = energy drain

Here are three easy basic steps to help you find a faster and more efficient backstroke.

#### STEP 1: ESTABLISH GOOD HAND/ARM POSITION

Begin by floating on your back, kicking just enough so that your legs don't drop.

— continued on 18

**PERFECT PULLUP**

**PERFECT FORM**

Perfect exercise. Pullups engage over 100 muscles, making them the absolute best exercise to work your back and biceps. Revolutionary Swing Arms provide beginner to advanced workouts and rotating handles minimize joint strain and maximize focus. The Perfect Pullup gets you ripped, fast. Be strong, be ready. [www.perfectpullup.com](http://www.perfectpullup.com) **PERFECT • PULLUP**

[www.perfectpullup.com](http://www.perfectpullup.com)

**POOL'S EDGE** — *continued from 17*

Keep your arms straight and place them in the water over your head in a “V”-like formation, creating a four-to-five-inch gap between your ear and shoulder.

This hand/arm placement may feel *really* wide, but if you start your stroke from this position, it is almost impossible to overreach.

While floating, notice the space between your ear and shoulder. If you move your arms closer to your head, feel how the tension in your shoulders increases. Now, move your arms away and notice that the tension decreases. A wider hand entry on backstroke is a more natural position for your shoulders, allows for a greater range of motion and will lay the foundation for a solid catch and pull.

**STEP 2: DOUBLE ARM BACKSTROKE**

Once you have set your “V,” swim a few laps using a double-arm backstroke with either a flutter or breaststroke kick. For the arm recovery, keep the chest open by bringing the arms up and around in an *arc*—like you are drawing a rainbow, not up and over the head as if you just scored a touchdown.

Yes, this may feel *too* wide, but you are probably right where you need to be at a 10-2 hand placement.

For the pull, plunge your hands down, pinky first, then bend at the elbow—drawing them into your side—as you “cup



[PHOTO BY DAVE CONZALES]

**ABOVE »** *At the age of 36, while swimming at Cal State Bakersfield, Karlyn Pipes-Neilsen set an NCAA Division II record in the 200 yard backstroke with a time of 2:00.54. She also holds numerous FINA Masters world records in backstroke that span four age groups.*

and shove” the water toward the opposite wall. Keep your wrist firm. To prevent getting stuck at the end of the pull, think about having slippery thighs as you quickly sweep up and into the recovery phase.

**STEP 3: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

Begin with a double-arm backstroke, then switch at mid-pool to a regular backstroke,

remembering to keep the shoulder away from the ear, as this may cause you to over-rotate, sending your arm back to your centerline.

Focus on the following:

- Drawing a rainbow for the recovery
- Keeping the entry wide
- Bending at the elbow as you “cup and shove”
- Keeping a firm wrist
- Having a quick release into the recovery

Other suggestions: keep your head neutral and chest open to allow your hips to rise. For your kick, point your feet inward and continuously tap the big toes to maintain a small, but powerful kick.

**BONUS STEP: CONTRAST YOUR NEW STROKE**

Once you are somewhat comfortable with your new stroke, it's time to see how much you have improved. Swim half a length with your “new” stroke, then revert to your old one. Notice a difference? If so, congratulations! You are well on your way to a faster and more efficient backstroke. ♦

For more information, visit [www.aquaticedge.org](http://www.aquaticedge.org) or e-mail [Pipes-Neilsen@aquaticedge@hawaii.rr.com](mailto:Pipes-Neilsen@aquaticedge@hawaii.rr.com).

**TRUWEST™**

**Any Color Any Design**

**“All the best, Wear truWest”**

**WATER POLO SUITS & SWIM SUITS  
SOLID OR SUBLIMATED**

**Get a total team look with Truwest matching Custom Robes, Bags, Parkas, Latex & Silicone Caps, Towels, Warm Ups, & Banners! Plus... Clipboards-Balls-Scoreboards And More...**

**Call for a Free Catalog  
800 322-3669  
[www.truwest.com](http://www.truwest.com)**

**MADE IN THE USA**