



TAKE A DEEP BREATH & SWIM

Introductory Breathing Drills By Drew Surinsky

As a swim coach, new clients frequently tell me that they swim "OK," but just can't get the breathing part down. It's not surprising that breathing issues are common in swimming. When you're in the water, you're visiting a liquid planet where the old rules just don't apply. Fortunately for land dwellers, I have compiled a list of drills that will make breathing during a swim feel like second nature.

Basics:

Simply put, inhale out of the water, exhale in the water.

Inhale through the mouth. Even though you breathe above water, you're still likely to take in some water droplets with each breath. The nose is poorly equipped to handle these droplets, but the mouth is great at it. Incidentally, don't try to inhale and exhale during your short out-of-water window. Instead, exhale underwater through the nose or by using both the nose and mouth simultaneously.

Breathing must fit your stroke rhythm. The hips are your body's chief time-keepers. As your hips roll, your face will roll with them. This allows you to be able to breathe without lifting your head and sinking your legs.

Drills:

OUT OF WATER BREATHING

Sitting comfortably, inhale deeply through the mouth and exhale through the nose or through both the nose and mouth. Continue doing this for a minute. Once this technique is mastered, focus on releasing facial tension especially tension near your mouth.

PISTON BOBBING

Stand in waist-high water or next to a bowl of water. Inhale deeply. Hold your breath briefly and then submerge your face in water, exhale. Come back up, take a break and repeat until mastered.

Once this drill has been completed and feels comfortable, repeat the process. But after emerging from the water, only pause long enough to take another breath before re-submerging. Gradually add repetitions and speed. If you begin to feel light-headed, you're probably breathing too quickly or forcefully.

AGITATOR BOBBING

Stand bent forward in water with arms at your sides and your face above the water (but not immersed). Rotate your trunk right, and inhale. Next,

turn forward (towards the water's surface), and exhale. Your breathing must match your body's position. Rotating to the left, then try alternating sides. Finally, repeat the entire sequence, but move your arms forward and backward to match your body's rolling.

Now it's time to start doing your breathing in water. Stand the same way you stood for the last drill, except get your face wet. Continue doing the motions that you perfected in the last drill, but inhale above water (to the side) and exhale underwater (forward). Use the same sequence as before (right, left, bilateral) and then add arm movement.

Growing in complexity, try floating while holding the side of the pool. Repeat the motions of the wet-faced drill, except keep your feet off of the bottom. As you roll, drop your breathing-side arm, so it doesn't block your mouth. Get your face into breathing position through rolling, not lifting your head. Roll as far as you need to feel comfortable, you can even go all the way onto your back. If you find this to be hard, try using a pull buoy (flotation device for legs). The buoy will decrease the difficulty of this exercise.

PRONE FLOATING

Okay, here's where you get to put all of the pieces together, the final step. You will be shifting your weight and rolling rather than pushing on the poolside. By following this last progression of drills, you will end up breathing and swimming simultaneously. This is much better than not breathing while swimming. Do the right, left and bilateral sequence at each step of this progression:

BUOY ROLLING + BREATHING ONLY
BUOY BREATHING ONLY
BUOY + BASIC ARM MOVEMENTS
BUOY BASIC ARM MOVEMENTS
BUOY REFINED ARM MOVEMENT
BUOY REFINED ARM MOVEMENTS

By the time you hit the last step, you'll notice that you are, in fact, swimming. Now, don't forget to practice and continue to work on your breathing. These drills may seem tedious eventually, but they are proven winners and will help you maintain correct breathing rhythm.

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