



Love to Swim School

Kicking: It's really about Balance

By Mary Reilly-Magee

It's a major complaint: "My kick gets me nowhere"; "My legs seem to drag behind me"; "All my energy is eaten up by my useless kick". The solution: find your balance in the water. When a swimmer's body is balanced, the head and the feet align, making movement through the water much more like coasting easily down a hill than struggling uphill. Balance places the feet at the surface, making movement of the feet easy and productive.

Okay, so how do you achieve this nirvana called balance? Start with the head. The top of the head must be wet (i.e. in the water) and pointing directly at the wall you're swimming toward. The eyes should be on the bottom of the pool, drawing a perpendicular line to the bottom, with the face paralleling the floor. If this is done correctly, the back of the head will have a little island in the center of it. Keep in mind that your body must be inline at all times. This means the head, spine, butt and feet are aligned, like a balanced human teeter-totter. Lean on the forehead and the sternum equally and simultaneously and your butt and feet will come up. Once your feet are up and you feel the existence of head, back and butt islands, gently flutter your feet to keep them from sinking and to give slight, effortless if slow, propulsion.

So now, about the actual technique involved in kicking: it should be effortless, originate from the hip, be done with a relatively straight leg, and have a short width between the feet with a fast fluttering tempo. Seems like a lot for something that's supposed to be effortless. But try this: imagine yourself swimming through a cylinder. If your kick is too wide or your kick originates from the knees, your feet will hit the walls of the cylinder, making your freestyle unbalanced and not streamlined. In other words, it will be a struggle.

A too wide kick is often the result of an unbalanced body. It's done to compensate. Deep feet require a wide kick to get the feet to break the surface. If the body is balanced, the wide kick is unnecessary and uncomfortable. Ideally, kicking should be a comfortable, natural motion that works in time with freestyle's rolling movement. Too much kicking becomes drag instead of propulsion.

Again, find and practice your balance first, then discover how easy it is to move through the water effortlessly with a relaxed, comfortable, straight-legged flutter kick.