

Breathing and Streamlining

By Betsy Durrant

Many swimmers, both experienced and novice, have problems with their breathing while swimming. Swimmers may get an "out of breath" feeling or have trouble taking in enough air. When this happens, swimming becomes a lot more difficult. In addition to the discomfort of not enough air, the higher you lift your head to breathe or the further you turn your head to breathe, the more your feet sink and you lose the streamline position.

Ideally, swimmers should remain in a streamline position while swimming to reduce resistance to the water. The head should be in alignment with the spine. When breathing, the head should be turned slightly to the side and a quick breath taken. The head is not lifted to get the breath; the head is turned with one ear always in the water. "Quick" is a key word to describe breathing.

When you breathe, the arm on the non-breathing side should remain just below the surface of the water (in a streamline position). If you take too long to get the breath, that arm sinks and the body is no longer in a streamline position, making swimming harder due to increased resistance or drag.

The secret to proper breathing is to be sure to exhale completely while your face is in the water. You may have to forcefully blow the air out. When you turn your head to breathe, you just need to take in a small amount of air, not a big gulp. If you blow out all of your air underwater, when you turn your head to breathe, the air will rush in because you have created a vacuum.

The problems arise when you do not exhale all of the air from each breath. You have to get rid of the "old" air in order to make room for the "new" air. The side ache and "out of breath" feeling come from not exhaling and therefore not having room in your lungs for more air. Think about it you have to exhale completely to make room for what is inhaled. Even experienced swimmers sometimes have to consciously think about completely exhaling.