

## Freestylers Should Be Free with Their Strokes [www.active.com/page19965.aspx](http://www.active.com/page19965.aspx)

By Bill Weaver • [Triathlete magazine](#)

Almost every great swimmer has achieved his or her greatness by developing a balanced training routine of more than one stroke. To ensure your longevity as a swimmer, it's important that you develop a second training stroke to compliment your freestyle training.

What many swimmers do not realize is that they can become a faster freestyler by [learning and training another stroke](#). In fact, by training at least two different strokes you can save yourself from injury and learn to enjoy a variety of workout options. Swim training is all about repetition, but it's that same repetition that can hurt you if you're doing the wrong thing too often. A person who does a 3,000-yard workout all freestyle will do anywhere between 600 and 1,100 revolutions with each arm. That much repetition without any variation will eventually lead to physical breakdown.

Additionally, training the same stroke every day can leave you mentally stale. Variety, as we know, is the spice of life, and it's that same variety of a second training stroke that can help you achieve your swimming goals and keep you in the sport as long as you wish. Whether you choose backstroke, breaststroke and/or butterfly, each will help you to discover a greater sense of feel for the water. Part of becoming an accomplished swimmer is learning how to work with the water. It's common to see a swimmer who appears to have decent [stroke technique](#), but who doesn't seem to be going anywhere.

On the other end of the spectrum, it's fascinating to watch a person who swims through the water grabbing at it as if it were a solid object and moving their body directly over their hand. The difference here is that the second swimmer has learned how to feel the water and use it to propel him or herself. The swimmer is working with the water, not against it. By putting yourself in different situations in the pool (training different strokes) you can develop a heightened sense of feel for the water. It's important to remember that to become a good freestyler you need to become a good swimmer. Developing yourself as a swimmer involves training your body in different positions in the pool.

### How to Benefit From Different Strokes

With backstroke, for example, propelling yourself through the water on your back will give you an entirely different sensation than being on your stomach. You'll be required to pull yourself through the water without seeing your hands. This will allow you to concentrate solely on your feel for the water. Breaststroke is also a great stroke to heighten your level of feel for the water. With breaststroke, your hands never have to leave the water. This allows you to keep a hold of the water throughout the entire stroke. Don't be afraid to modify any of the strokes to fit your own personal needs. For example, if you've had a history of knee problems and the breaststroke kick irritates you knees, try doing a breaststroke pull with a freestyle kick. This will allow you to focus on your feel for the water and help you to develop a stronger freestyle kick. There are many options from which to choose. Allow yourself to experiment in the pool. The more comfortable you are at propelling your body through the water in different positions and with different arm strokes, the better your feel will be and the better your freestyle will become.

If all you have ever trained is freestyle and you're wondering where to start, consider trying the backstroke, which is basically the opposite of freestyle. This stroke will allow you to continue to develop a consistent and powerful flutter kick, while causing you to focus on holding great body position. The body positions of freestyle and backstroke are virtually equal, having your head, shoulders and hips in a straight line on top of the water. Additionally, both strokes give you the opportunity to work on good rotation. In each stroke, you are required to rotate from side to side to obtain a powerful pull. Because of the tremendous similarities between the two strokes, backstroke offers an excellent second training stroke for any swimmer. In addition to helping you learn to work with the water, backstroke will help to [balance your strength in the water](#) by causing you to rotate your arms in the opposite direction of freestyle. This, in turn, will allow you to balance the strength and endurance of your shoulders. Remember, your second stroke will almost always be slower than freestyle, so allow yourself some extra time in the pool. Additionally, when you're training a second stroke, focus on the quality of your workout, not the quantity. If you're a person who likes to count yards or meters when working out, save it for your freestyle workouts. Don't be afraid of trying something new, and, as is often helpful, be patient and keep an open mind.

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