



ANXIOUS SWIMMER LESSON PLANS

Lesson #2

Are you a first time ATLS swimmer? First time to Gyro? Regular swimmer in a pool? What is the most distance you have done in water? Any open water swimming experience? Are you also training to do a triathlon? What makes you most anxious about swimming in open water?

Review from last week:

- 1) the many things that can make you anxious,
- 2) optimal use of your equipment
- 3) acclimatizing to cold water,
- 4) the confidence builder pop-up drill,
- 5) rest/recovery position.

More Basics - arguably the most important basic skill of all: BREATHING! Specifically, breathing in water, while swimming. You see, swimming is the only sport where breathing matters—a lot! In fact, if you don't have your breathing under control, your stroke mechanics don't matter.

On Breathing

You have of course, long mastered breathing--it is almost automatic—you don't have to think about it, and you can do it whenever you want to. But how many here have breathing issues while swimming? Especially finding and maintaining a steady breathing rhythm?

SEVERAL IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES. Breathing while swimming requires some new skills:

- 1) **The drive to breathe** is not based on your need for oxygen—it **is based on the build up of carbon dioxide (CO₂)**. This means that keeping the urge to breathe controlled, you have to focus primarily on getting air out of you.

- 2) Breathing rhythm and inhalations in swimming are no longer automatic—you can't breathe in whenever you want to, especially doing freestyle/front crawl. You can only breathe in when your mouth is briefly above water—**swimming seems to regiment your inhalations.**
- 3) Breathing out is different as well!: You have to expire in water, and **exhaling into water requires physical effort.**
- 4) Two kinds of breathing are used, both differently in swimming:
 - A) Diaphragmatic (belly breathing) what most of you are doing right now, what we all do at rest. Only your diaphragm muscle works, to suck air in and out of your chest cavity.
 - B) Chest breathing—Your chest starts to heave up and out proportionate your level of physical activity. Small muscles attached to your ribs help open your chest up more, requiring more work, but the release of this increased air in is automatic and easy.

Lesson 2

1) Dry Land: Feel your breathing

Put a hand on your chest and on your belly while at rest. Notice your belly moving and not your chest. **Diaphragmatic breathing** uses one muscle, contracting easily--totally effortless, right?

Now, for **chest breathing**: take in a deeper breath. Feel the chest move, and not the belly. This takes more work, since you are now engaging a lot of extra muscles to lift the chest. Try taking a deep breath in and holding it for a few seconds: Notice how easy it is to release the air out of your chest with chest breathing. This is because of chest wants to collapse back down to where it was—it doesn't like being stretched out, and so with elastic recoil pushes air back out.

2) Completely empty your lungs.

Repeat the chest expanding breath in, and passively release it. Lots of air comes out. But there is lots of air still in your chest that needs to come out. Tighten your diaphragm to exhale more air—try snorting the last part of air out through your nose. When chest breathing, **think of your exhalations as having two phases**: a) a passive elastic recoil, and b) an active, forced diaphragmatic finish to completely empty your lungs.

Complete emptying of your lungs is critical to keeping your CO₂ from building up, and to keep your drive to breathe (and therefore your anxiety) under control.

3) Integrating breathing with your swimming stroke

When breathing every 3rd stroke in freestyle, you take a chest breath inhalation in through your mouth (since that is the quickest way to get a lot of air into your lungs) on one stroke, and then you can recoil exhale for one stroke, and forcefully expire (diaphragmatically) for another stroke to maximize emptying of your lungs before breathing in on the opposite side. (Demo)

If you are breathing every 2nd stroke, then these two phases are hurried and mostly combined into one, which can also occur when sprinting. (Demo)

In both cases you should be having a smooth and continuous expiration, so that water doesn't get up your nose. One useful trick to know that you are continuously expiring is to hum while your face is in the water.

A strategy to prevent getting water up your nose when turning to breathe is to finish the last part of your exhalation with a snort through your nose.

4) In Open Water: Integrating Breathing with swimming

Now try the same breathing processes while swimming: A quick, powerful inhalation in through your mouth using your chest, followed by a two phased expiration, emphasizing complete emptying of your chest, using humming and a finishing snort to help you as necessary. Try to swim this way for 50 to 100 m, and use a recovery position if necessary if you lose control of your breathing. If you can do this breathing routine for 100 m without becoming short of breath, try to go longer.

5) Varying your breathing cadence

Once you have nailed breathing every 3 without becoming short of breath, it is time to get comfortable with varying your breathing without losing control of your breathing.

Try 20-25m of breathing every 2 strokes, or until it feels like you are breathing too much. Then start missing every second inhalation, so that you are breathing every 4 strokes, and maintain that until you feel you can't handle it anymore before reverting back to every 2 strokes. Then experiment with breathing every three, every 2, or every 4 strokes as you feel you can tolerate, all without losing control of your breathing.

6) Distance practice

The 800m loop if there is time, and if your breathing is under control; Alternately, a 600m (out and back from 0m to 500m). In either case, try not touching your feet down—use your recovery position if needed, instead.