

Preventing Shoulder Issues by Chris Harrigan

Swimming can be one of the best exercises to promote health and wellbeing. It is a low impact sport, and it works your entire body. Being a decent swimmer can even save your life! Swimming is not without injuries however, and the majority of swimming injuries are shoulder related. The good news is that these can be nearly completely prevented through proper technique. In this article we will show you a simple way to avoid one of the biggest mistakes that leads to shoulder injuries in swimming, and at the same time it will boost your performance in the water.

If you hold your arms out straight in front of you with your hands in the thumbs up position, your shoulder joint sits in a very comfortable position. Now if you rotate your thumbs towards each other and continue rotating them until they are pointing downward, you are impinging your shoulder. This impingement is what you should try to avoid during your stroke while swimming. The most common place for this type of impingement to take place is during the arm recovery, hand entry into the water, and the initiation of the pull.

During the arm recovery, your arm should be as relaxed as possible. Keeping your muscles tense during your arm recovery uses energy and keeps your muscles from having a brief rest period. The muscles around your elbow joint should be completely released to the point that your arm from the elbow down would swing back and forth if someone pushed on it. At the same time your thumb should be facing your body through the entire arm recovery phase. This keeps your shoulder joint in a nice neutral position that should not be impinging at all.

One of the most critical phases of your freestyle technique is when your hand enters the water at the top of your stroke. One little known fact is that very good swimmers consistently manage to enter their hands into the water without catching any bubbles on the palms of their hands. The presence of bubbles on your hand severely decreases the amount of pressure you can apply to the water. Think of it as the difference between locking up your brakes and sliding verses having anti-lock brakes. One of the best ways to eliminate bubbles from your hand is to have your hand enter the water pinky down. Your hand doesn't need to be vertical, 45 degrees will do. Having your hand in this position also keeps your shoulder from being impinged. After your hand is completely submerged, rotate your hand to the flat position before you initiate your pull. This further eliminates any bubbles that may have developed on your hand during entry. Many swimmers enter the water with their thumbs first. This is one of the worst things you can do for your shoulder. It severely impinges your shoulder right when you are initiating pressure against the water. Many swimmers like to enter their hands into the water with their hands flat against the water. While this doesn't impinge your shoulder as bad as entering thumb first, it has a tendency to cause a lot of bubbles to build up on your hand.

When you initiate your pull against the water, your palm should never face any direction but directly behind you. This keeps your shoulder from being impinged and ensures that the energy you exert is used efficiently to move you forward through the water. In addition you should try to keep from "crossing over" during your pull. If you can imagine a plane that runs between your spinal cord straight down to the bottom of the pool, your fingertips should drag along, but

never cross, this imaginary line through your pull. Even though your body is rotating side to side as you swim, this imaginary plane still exists, and your fingers should drag along it for your entire pull until you start moving your hand to break the surface of the water to begin your recovery.

There are other areas that you can impinge your shoulder while swimming, but the most common areas have been addressed in this article. Hopefully you will be able to use the information here to both improve your performance and prevent any potential shoulder injuries down the line.