

Open Water Swim Tips

Safety:

- Try to find a buddy or a swim beach with a lifeguard. Do not swim alone.
- Wear a brightly colored swim cap if possible.
- Are you able to tread water for an extended period of time in the event of a cramp?
- Know the temperature of the water as well as some of the potential hazards of overexposure to extreme hot or cold water: dehydration in hot water, dizziness or lightheaded-ness in cold water, decreased or increased core temperature.
- Ask yourself how far you feel comfortable swimming without holding onto something.

General Hints and Tips:

- Stay relaxed. Do whatever it takes to stay relaxed in the water, even if it means repeating 'stay relaxed' over and over to yourself.
- If you feel panicked while in a race or on your own, consider stopping to tread water, do some breaststroke, or swim on your back as you need to.
- Try to maintain a breathing rhythm similar to that you have established while in the pool. Focus on exhaling and inhaling and try not to hold your breath.
- Try to mimic your pool swimming stroke while in open water. Concentrate on the same things...head down, long strokes, smooth strokes, steady kicking, etc.

Sighting and Navigation:

- Practice sighting in a pool by lifting your head to breathe every so often. OR, swim with your eyes closed for a few strokes, and then lift your head to breathe and note where you are in relation to the center of the lane.
- Initially sight more often than you think you need to. It does not take too many strokes to veer off course at a 30 or 45 degree angle.
- Know the basic layout of the course and where to expect each of the swim buoys. This will help in finding the first buoy and keeping it in sight.
- If swimming into the sun, make an early effort to 'lock on' to the first buoy. I find that it is easier to maintain course if I find the buoy early.
- Find markers 'beyond' the buoy that are taller/larger than the actual buoy. It can be easier to find these objects that are above the water level than a small buoy.
- 'Backtrack' from the exit of the swim if possible to find an on land 'landmark' to help you locate the exit of the swim.
- If you find yourself off course, make small adjustments as needed and try not to make large corrections.
- If you roll over onto your back, look to make sure you are headed in the right direction before resuming freestyle swimming.

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Swim Starts:

- Line up according to your ability. Stronger swimmers in the front, not-so-strong swimmers middle to back.
- I prefer to start at the edge of the group UNLESS the group is not that big or the start line is very wide. There is less congestion, and the time saved avoiding congestion generally outweighs the extra distance swum.
- Try to maintain a horizontal body position. When 50-100 people are crammed into a small area and are all vertical, they suddenly need 2-3x as much space when everyone goes horizontal to start swimming. If possible, maintain a horizontal orientation to keep your 'space.' This is sometimes difficult.
- In the water start begins treading water. Practice this type of start if you know the race will be a deep water start.
- Out of the water start begins on land running into the water. Run until you can no longer pick your feet up above the surface of the water. Then dolphin-dive or begin swimming.
- If there are waves breaking, go under them if at all possible.

Open Water Turns:

- Stay as close to the intermediate buoys as possible to minimize the distance swum.
- Swim a little 'wide' when approaching the buoy to avoid the inside line congestion.
- If possible, accelerate into and out of the turn. This will help you maintain contact with those in front of you or possible break away from those behind you.

Group Swimming:

- Navigate away from an overly aggressive swimmer. You will both lose time if you are in very close proximity to one another.
- Focus on comfortable and smooth swimming before worrying about learning to 'draft' another swimmer. Sometimes swimming with smooth long strokes is going to be more productive than trying to find a swimmer or group of swimmers to draft.

Wetsuits:

- Try the wetsuit on before purchasing. It should fit almost 'uncomfortably tight' out of the water. They all seem to loosen up a little in the water.
- Pull the crotch and armpits up as far as possible.
- If possible, 'swim' the wetsuit into place before starting the race. A warm-up like this may not always be possible.
- If the run from the swim exit is very long, consider taking off the wetsuit upon exiting the water.
- Use bodyglide to prevent chafing.
- Vaseline is not recommended for use on wetsuits.

Practice, practice, practice...the best way to practice for open water swimming is to find a place to practice open water swimming.