



PRECISION SWIMMING

MARGARET RIVER

Backstroke Program

Build a smooth, efficient backstroke from the ground up. Body position, kick, rotation and pull, step by step.



How to Read a Workout

Each workout in this program is written in a simple format. Here is how to read it.

4 x 50m

Swim 50 metres (two lengths of a 25m pool), and do it four times. Rest between each one as shown.

Easy / Medium / Hard

Easy = relaxed conversational pace. Medium = working but in control. Hard = pushing yourself, heavy breathing.

20s rest

After you finish the swim, rest at the wall for 20 seconds before starting the next one. If no rest is shown, go straight into the next set.

Warm Up

Easy swimming at the start of the session to get your body moving and your muscles warm. Never skip this.

Cool Down

Easy swimming at the end of the session to help your body recover. Keep it relaxed and smooth.

Build

Start the swim slowly and gradually increase your speed within the same rep. Finish faster than you started.

Descend 1-4

Each rep gets faster than the one before. Rep 1 is easy, rep 4 is fast. Your effort increases with each one.

Drill-Swim

Swim part of the distance as a drill (a technique exercise) and the rest as normal swimming. For example, 25m drill followed by 25m full stroke.

Stroke Count

Count how many strokes it takes you to swim one length. Fewer strokes at the same speed means you are becoming more efficient. Track this over time.



Swimming Terminology

Rotation

The rolling of your body along its long axis during each stroke. In backstroke, rotation connects your arm pull to your kick and reduces drag.

Recovery

The phase when your arm travels above the water to return to the entry position. In backstroke, your arm stays straight and passes directly over the shoulder.

What's a Lap?

In swimming, a lap is one length of the pool, from one wall to the other. In a standard short-course pool, 1 lap = 25m.

What Does Nonstop Mean?

If a set says "75 Freestyle", that means you will swim three lengths in a row without stopping, swimming freestyle (front crawl), and you will only rest after completing the full distance.

Entry

The moment your hand enters the water at the start of the pull. In backstroke, the little finger enters first, about shoulder width.

Catch

The initial part of the underwater pull where your hand grips the water. A good catch sets up the power for the rest of the stroke.

Lap Distance Guide

DISTANCE	WHAT THAT MEANS
25m	1 lap
50m	2 laps nonstop (down and back)
100m	4 laps nonstop
200m	8 laps nonstop

You Can Always Modify

If you need to pause at the wall to catch your breath, that is not bad. This program is designed to build your skills, confidence, and control over time. Progress over perfection.

Different pool length? If your pool is a different length, simply follow the program as written. The structure and training benefits remain the same.



Equipment Guide

The gear referenced in this program and how to use it properly.

Fins (Swim Fins)

Short rubber fins worn on your feet. They make kicking easier and faster, helping you hold good body position while learning drills. Use short training fins, not long snorkelling fins. They should fit snugly.

Kickboard

A flat foam board you hold against your chest during backstroke kick drills. It supports your upper body so you can focus entirely on your kick. Hold it lightly against your chest.

Do I need to buy all of this?

Most pools have kickboards available for lane swimmers. Fins are worth owning if you plan to train regularly. Ask at your local pool what they have available.



Drill Guide

The drills used throughout this program. Refer back to this page whenever you need a refresher.

Back Float Kick

Float on your back with arms at your sides. Add a gentle flutter kick from the hips. Keep your hips high, head still, and ears in the water. Focus on balance, not speed.

Board Kick Back

Hold a kickboard against your chest with both hands. Kick backstroke with a steady flutter kick from the hips. Your toes should just break the surface. Keep your core tight and hips high.

6-Kick Roll

Kick on your side with the bottom arm extended forward. After six kicks, roll to the other side. Let your hips lead the roll. Your head stays still.

Single Arm Backstroke

Swim backstroke using only one arm at a time. Keep the other arm resting at your side. Focus on a clean entry (little finger first), a strong pull, and full rotation. Switch arms each length.

Catch-Up Backstroke

Swim backstroke, but wait for one arm to complete its full stroke and return to your side before the other arm begins. This slows the stroke down and forces you to feel the timing.

Pause Drill

Pause briefly at the top of each arm recovery. Check your hand position and entry angle before letting the arm continue into the water.



Your 6-Step Progression

Master backstroke one layer at a time. Each step builds on the last.

1

Body Position

Flat body, still head, hips at the surface.

2

Kick Technique

Steady, hip-driven kick that keeps you moving.

3

Rotation

Roll your body as a connected unit.

4

Arm Entry & Pull

Clean entry, strong pull, full finish.

5

Timing & Coordination

Connect arms, kick and rotation into one stroke.

6

Backstroke Session

Put it all together in a complete workout.

Equipment Used

Fins

Short training fins for kick and rotation drills.

Kickboard

For isolating the backstroke kick.

STEP 1

Body Position

Flat body, still head, hips at the surface.

1



Step 1

Step 1: Body Position

Everything in backstroke starts with position. If your body is flat and balanced, the stroke works. If it's not, nothing else matters.

Back Float Kick

Float on your back with arms at your sides. Add a gentle flutter kick from the hips. Keep your hips high, head still, ears in the water. Focus on balance, not speed. The less you move your head, the more stable you become.

"Imagine you're lying on a table. Don't let your hips sag below the surface."

Key Focus Points

Flat Body Line

Hips at the surface, core engaged. If your hips sink, everything becomes harder.

Still Head

Eyes up. Pick a fixed point on the ceiling. Your head should not rock or turn with each stroke.

Ears in the Water

This is the easiest check. If your ears are dry, your head is too high.

Relaxed Neck

Tension in your neck pulls your head forward and drops your hips. Let it go.

STEP 2

Kick Technique

Steady, hip-driven kick that keeps you moving.

2



Step 2

Step 2: Kick Technique

The kick drives everything. A good backstroke kick keeps your hips high, your body stable, and provides constant propulsion.

Board Kick Back

Hold a kickboard against your chest with both hands. Kick backstroke with a steady flutter kick from the hips. Your toes should just break the surface. Keep your core tight and hips high.

"Small, fast kicks from the hips. Your knees should barely bend. Think boiling water, not bicycle pedals."

Key Focus Points

Kick from the Hips

The power source. Stiff knees or kicking from the knees means slower, harder, less efficient movement.

Toes Just Break the Surface

Not a big splash. A small flutter that generates propulsion without creating drag.

Steady Rhythm

Even tempo. The kick never stops. It provides constant propulsion and stability.

Relaxed Ankles

Loose, flexible ankles let the feet move naturally. Pointed toes, not flexed.

STEP 3

Rotation

Roll your body as a connected unit.

3



Step 3

Step 3: Rotation

Backstroke is not a flat stroke. Your body should roll smoothly along its long axis with each arm cycle, driven by the hips.

6-Kick Roll

Kick on your side with the bottom arm extended forward. After six kicks, roll to the other side. Let your hips lead the roll. Your head stays still.

"Hips roll first. Everything else follows. Don't force it with your shoulders."

Key Focus Points

Hips Drive the Roll

Rotation starts in the hips, not the shoulders. Think of your body as a single unit rotating along its long axis.

45-Degree Rotation

You don't need to roll flat to the side. A moderate rotation is enough to connect your pull to your body.

Head Stays Still

Your head is the anchor point. The body rotates around it.

Both Sides Even

Rotate the same amount in each direction. If one side feels different, that's where to focus.

STEP 4

Arm Entry & Pull

Clean entry, strong pull, full finish.

4



Step 4

Step 4: Arm Entry & Pull

Your arms provide the main propulsion. A clean entry and complete pull, connected to your body rotation, is what moves you through the water.

Single Arm Backstroke

Swim backstroke using one arm at a time. Keep the other arm resting at your side. Focus on: entry with the little finger, a straight-arm recovery, and pulling through to your hip.

"Your hand enters at 11 o'clock (right arm) or 1 o'clock (left arm). Pull in a straight line past your hip."

Key Focus Points

Little Finger First

Your hand enters the water pinky-first, about shoulder width. This sets up a clean, deep catch.

Straight Arm Recovery

Your arm should travel straight up and over, brushing past your ear. Don't let it swing wide.

Pull to the Hip

The stroke finishes when your hand pushes past your hip. Complete the stroke.

Connect to Rotation

Each arm pull should coincide with the hip rotation. They work together, not separately.

STEP 5

Timing & Coordination

Connect arms, kick and rotation into one stroke.





Step 5

Step 5: Timing & Coordination

Now you connect everything. Arms, kick and rotation working as one smooth, continuous stroke.

Catch-Up Backstroke

Swim backstroke, but wait for one arm to complete its full stroke and return to your side before the other arm begins. This slows the stroke down and forces you to feel the timing between pull, kick and rotation.

"One arm works, one arm waits. Be patient. Feel the full pull from entry to exit before starting the next arm. Keep the kick steady throughout."

Key Focus Points

Opposite Arm, Opposite Hip

When one arm enters the water, the opposite hip rotates up. This connection drives the stroke.

Continuous Kick

The kick never stops. It provides stability and drives the rotation. 6 kicks per arm cycle.

Straight Arm Recovery

Recovering arm stays straight and relaxed, swinging directly over the shoulder.

Steady Head

If your head moves, everything falls apart. Lock it in place. Let the body rotate around it.

Navigating without sight: Count your strokes per length to learn the pool. Use the flags (5m from the wall) to know when to prepare for the turn.



Step 6

Backstroke Session

Put it all together. A 1,200m workout that takes you through every skill in this program.

1

Warm Up

4 x 50m easy freestyle. Settle in.

Easy

20s rest

2

Body Position

4 x 25m backstroke kick, arms at sides. Hips high, ears in.

Easy

20s rest

3

Kick with Board

4 x 25m backstroke kick, kickboard on chest.

Easy

20s rest

Kickboard

4

Rotation Drill

4 x 25m 6-kick roll with fins. Rotate the body, not the head.

Easy

20s rest

Fins

5

Single Arm

4 x 50m single arm backstroke (25m left, 25m right). Connect pull to hip rotation.

Medium

30s rest

Fins (optional)

6

Full Stroke

4 x 100m backstroke. Focus on rhythm and stroke count.

Medium

30s rest

7

Cool Down

2 x 50m easy choice swim. Relaxed and smooth.

Easy

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Total: 1,200 Metres

Count your strokes: Track how many strokes it takes per 25m of backstroke. As your technique improves, the count will drop. This is the simplest measure of efficiency.



Common Faults & Fixes

Body Position

Sitting in the water, body too low or bent at the hips

Fix: Push your chest up and arch your back slightly to bring your hips to the surface. Check your head position. If it is too far forward, your hips will drop.

Head too far back, too far forward, or moving side to side

Fix: Tuck your chin slightly so the water just covers your ears. Keep your head completely still and look at a fixed point on the ceiling or sky.

Snaking action through the water

Fix: Go back to kick drills and make sure your arm action is continuous and even. Snaking usually comes from an uneven or pausing arm cycle.

Hips swinging side to side

Fix: This is usually caused by arms swinging low and sideways during recovery. Keep your arm recovery straight, with fingers pointing to the sky.

Leg Action

Knees coming out of the water, too much bend

Fix: You are leading with your knees instead of your hips. Focus on kicking from the hip. Only your toes should just break the surface. Think about making the water boil with your feet.

Feet not pointed, stepping or punching action

Fix: Work on ankle flexibility. Your toes should be pointed and turned slightly inward on the upbeat to push water backward.

Stiff knees

Fix: Your knees should bend slightly on the upward phase of the kick. The movement should feel loose and natural, not rigid.

Irregular kick rhythm

Fix: Let an even, rhythmic six-beat kick develop naturally through practice. Count your kicks if it helps: 1-2-3-4-5-6, steady and continuous.



Common Faults & Fixes

Arm Action

Flat hand entry (palm slapping the water)

Fix: Your little finger should enter the water first, about 10-20cm below the surface. Rotate your hand so the pinky leads.

Arms crossing beyond the midline during entry

Fix: Your hands should enter the water along your shoulder line, not behind your head or across your body.

Stroke too fast and shallow, missing depth

Fix: Slow down. Practice catch-up backstroke drill and focus on rolling your shoulders and pulling below the surface. Push water that has not already been disturbed.

Straight-arm pull underwater

Fix: Your arm should bend during the underwater pull (about 90 degrees at the elbow). Practice with catch-up drill and single-arm drill.

Arm bent during recovery

Fix: Your arm should be straight and relaxed during recovery above the water. Let it brush past your ear naturally.

Leading with the elbow, arm slipping through water

Fix: Focus on keeping your hand away from your body during the pull. Your forearm should rotate so your hand finishes the push at your thigh.

Breathing

Water washing over face

Fix: Check your head and body position. Keep your head still and look slightly in the direction you are swimming from (diagonally up and back).

Not exhaling fully, getting tired quickly

Fix: Establish a rhythm: breathe in as one arm recovers, breathe out as the other recovers. Make each breath full and deep.

B A C K S T R O K E

Practice Workouts

Ten standalone sessions to put your skills into practice. The first five are accessible for all levels. The last five are for when you are ready to push further.



Workout 1: Balance & Position

Backstroke starts with a flat body and a still head. Get comfortable on your back.

1**Warm Up**

4 x 50m easy freestyle.

Easy

20s rest

2**Back Float Kick**

4 x 25m backstroke kick, arms at sides. Hips high, ears in the water.

Easy

15s rest

3**Streamline Kick**

4 x 25m backstroke kick in streamline. Tight core, small kicks.

Easy

15s rest

4**Easy Backstroke**

4 x 50m backstroke. Focus on keeping your head still.

Easy

20s rest

5**Cool Down**

100m easy freestyle.

Easy

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Total: approx. 800 Metres



Workout 2: Kick Development

The kick drives your body position. Keep it small, keep it from the hips.

1

Warm Up

4 x 50m easy freestyle.

Easy**20s rest****2**

Board Kick

4 x 50m backstroke kick with kickboard on chest.

Easy**20s rest****Kickboard****3**

Fins Kick

4 x 25m backstroke kick with fins. Feel the speed from small kicks.

Easy**15s rest****Fins****4**

Kick-Swim

4 x 50m: 25m back kick + 25m full backstroke.

Easy**20s rest****5**

Easy Backstroke

2 x 100m backstroke. Relaxed and rhythmic.

Easy**30s rest****6**

Cool Down

100m easy freestyle.

Easy**--****Total: approx. 900 Metres**



Workout 3: Single Arm Work

Isolate each arm to build the pull pattern. Keep the other arm at your side.

1**Warm Up**

4 x 50m easy freestyle.

Easy

20s rest

2**Single Arm Left**

4 x 25m left arm only backstroke. Right arm at your side.

Easy

15s rest

3**Single Arm Right**

4 x 25m right arm only backstroke. Left arm at your side.

Easy

15s rest

4**Alternating**

4 x 50m: 25m single left + 25m single right.

Easy

20s rest

5**Full Stroke**

4 x 50m backstroke. Connect each arm to your hip rotation.

Medium

20s rest

6**Cool Down**

100m easy choice.

Easy

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Total: approx. 1,000 Metres



Workout 4: Rotation & Timing

Your body should rotate with each stroke. Think hips, not shoulders.

1**Warm Up**

4 x 50m easy freestyle.

Easy

20s rest

2**6-Kick Roll**

4 x 25m: 6 kicks on one side, roll, 6 kicks on the other.

Easy

15s rest

Fins

3**Catch-Up Back**

4 x 50m backstroke catch-up. One arm finishes before the other starts.

Easy

20s rest

4**Swim with Focus**

4 x 50m backstroke. Feel the hip drive on each pull.

Medium

20s rest

5**Continuous Swim**

2 x 100m backstroke. Settle into the rotation rhythm.

Medium

30s rest

6**Cool Down**

100m easy choice.

Easy

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Total: approx. 1,000 Metres



Workout 5: Full Stroke Flow

Put it all together. Flat body, steady kick, connected rotation.

1**Warm Up**

4 x 50m easy freestyle.

Easy

20s rest

2**Kick Set**

4 x 25m backstroke kick, arms at sides.

Easy

15s rest

3**Drill-Swim**

4 x 50m: 25m single arm + 25m full backstroke.

Easy

20s rest

4**Backstroke Swim**

4 x 100m backstroke. Count strokes per length.

Medium

30s rest

5**Mixed Swim**

2 x 100m: 50m backstroke + 50m freestyle.

Medium

20s rest

6**Cool Down**

100m easy choice.

Easy

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Total: approx. 1,200 Metres



See You in the Water.

You've built the foundation for a strong backstroke. Body position, kick, rotation and pull, all connected. Now take it to the pool and let the stroke flow.

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