

# Lap Swimming Tips

---

[Pete Matthews Jr](#) – [3nt.xyz](#) – © August 16, 2021

## Optimize the Push-off

Pushing off the wall should be powerful and streamlined. Stretch your arms ahead, hands together, maybe one hand on top of the other. Stretch your legs and point your toes. Hold the glide, which is the fastest you will swim! Even the fastest racers slow down when they start swimming after pushing off the wall, so hold that glide for “free” distance.

## Swim Crawl Stroke Forever

Coming off the wall, end your glide with a **dolphin kick**, and take another with your first arm stroke. This will shake out your back, so you can swim crawl stroke “forever.” The dolphin kicks should mean you don’t need to mix in other strokes to give your back a break.

The dolphin kick is similar to the flutter kick of the crawl stroke, but both legs at the same time. This kick is like a wave running down your body: hips down, then knees down, then feet down. It does not need to be large. It should feel smooth and keep you moving forward.

Swimming will be more balanced, **breathing on both sides**. The way I accomplish this is to breathe on one side going down the pool, and the other side on the way back. This means facing the same wall, each way. I always breathe away from the windows or brightest lights, since my eyes appreciate that.

Don’t proceed down the pool like a block with side wheels. When the arm goes into the water, **reach out** that hand and **roll** onto the arm. Do it again on the other arm, even when you are not taking a breath. **Long strokes** include a **glide** and are more efficient. Short of breath? Concentrate on **breathing out!**

Finish the stroke well, and pull the hand out of the water with the palm still facing your feet. Do not flip the hand at the end, which can cause elbow or wrist pain.

## Open Turns Are Better for Lap Swimming

Whatever turn you do, make sure turning at the wall is comfortable and promptly positions your feet for a strong push-off. **Keep moving**; don’t stop dead. All good turns **translate your swimming momentum into a rotation**.

In the **open turn**, your hand goes on the wall, you use your hand to roll your body up and away from the forward arm (grabbing a breath & maybe a peek at the clock), and position for the push-off. It’s quite possible to use your momentum to

do a good open turn on a flat wall; being able to grab the wall makes it easier, so long as you do not stop moving.

The ***racing flip turn*** is a half somersault with a half twist. Usually, a quarter twist happens with the half somersault, and the second quarter twist happens as part of the push-off. The only parts of your body that touch the wall are your feet. Some swimmers turn the same way all the time, but it can be better to send your head down and away from whichever arm is forward – essentially two different turns. This twisting half-somersault can strain your torso, especially if you are a little overweight, as the author is. While this turn is a little faster, it's more tiring than an open turn: more work, and you don't get a breath.

## **The Lochte Turn**

In August, 2016, I saw an article and video in the New York Times about Ryan Lochte's flip turn. Instead of the usual flip turn, he went straight over, and came out on his back. He delayed the half twist until he started swimming. As top backstrokers do, he used aggressive dolphin kicks coming off the wall. He claimed it was like having a rest in the middle of the race. I tried it, and found it to be true. It was super for lap swimming! However, I think this turn was responsible for Lochte's lackluster performance in the Olympics. Instead of looking forward to a rest on a turn, you have to be thinking of nailing the turn and kicking butt off the wall.

This turn worked so much better for me than the normal flip turn that I stuck with it for 16 months of sinus infections. After 8 months, I started using a nose clip, but it seemed worse – pool water seemed to get in there through my mouth, and then stay there. Finally, I had to give up the Lochte turn.

Going back to the normal flip turn no longer worked for me, hurting my ribs when doing many of them. I now do open turns with dolphin kicks off the wall. My standard swim is 2500 yards: 96 lengths of crawl stroke, followed by four lengths on my back, alternating back crawl and double-arm with whip/frog kick. (I do use standard flip turns on the occasions when I do interval training.)

## **Sinus Infections**

Antibiotics can help with a sinus infection, but a normal course seldom works for me after the pills run out. Much better is a two-pronged attack:

1. NeilMed Sinus Rinse every morning. I buy it in bulk when it goes on sale at Costco. Since I use distilled water in the humidifier of my CPAP machine (yup, sleep apnea, too), I start with leftover warm water, top it off, and refill the CPAP reservoir for the next night. If it gets really bad, I rinse at night as well – then I heat the distilled water for 15-20 seconds in the microwave.

2. Fluticasone nasal spray (generic of FLONASE), just before bedtime. I get the Kirkland brand in a 5-pack when it goes on sale at Costco. When things are really bad, I use this in the morning as well, after the sinus rinse.

This plan has been approved by my ENT doctor, who says that more intense treatment would be a course of prednisone (a stronger steroid) or surgery. The fear card keeps me on my regimen.

After getting vaccinated, I resumed swimming twice a week. I delay my sinus rinse until after my swim, and I have had no sinus issues. I **prepare warm sinus rinse** in an 8-oz disposable bottle, **take it to the pool** to use with the squeeze bottle, and bring it home again for months of reuse.

## Swim Suits

For lap swimming, you want a low-maintenance suit that you do not notice while swimming. The chlorine in the pool quickly breaks down the typical nylon & Lycra swim suit – those suits come in many styles and patterns, but may last as little as a month before becoming transparent where stretched. Swimmers often wear two at a time, to get more life out of them.

For many years, my favorite suit was the **TYR Durafast**. The fabric is **100% polyester**, woven to be as elastic as Lycra. Chlorine does not affect the fabric or its elasticity, which can last for years. All you need to do is rinse the suit in tap water after the workout.

Speedo and other manufacturers have similar fabrics. All are available only in solid colors. Some have an accent color spliced in; the extra seams proved to be additional points of failure in the Durafasts that I bought on closeout, when the solid colors were gone.

TYR has replaced the comfortable front-lined Durafast with the fully-lined Durafast Elite, made with Durafast II fabric billed as Lycra. Hopefully, the Durafast II name is just a marketing change for the same fabric, which needed no improvement, with a license for the Lycra name. However, when I tested the fully-lined Speedo product years ago, it felt like a diaper, and I did not like wearing it; ditto for a Durafast Elite, which I returned. I did find a lone offering that appeared to be the old suit, with a big TYR logo on the butt – not for me.

My current suit is the **Dolphin Competition** polyester suit. It is front-lined and comfortable. However, the suit string is thinner than TYR's and only just long enough. Also, the thread on the seams has discolored – that thread is every bit as important as the fabric itself.

That's my take. Swim Outlet, where I usually get my swim gear, has their take at <https://www.swimoutlet.com/blogs/guides/understanding-competition-swimsuit-fabrics>.

## Counting Laps

A lap is two lengths; my preference is to count by lengths. However, counting 100 lengths accurately is a near impossibility, although I do make the effort. It's somewhat easier when swimming faster, as there is less energy for daydreaming.

My nominal pace is one minute for two lengths. What I really count is the number of minutes I do better (or worse) than that pace. This is particularly useful in the current environment: I reserve half a lane and have only 45 minutes in it. When I first came back, I could only do 92 lengths or so. Now I make my 100 lengths every time that I get into the water on time; I watch the clock and push hard enough to gain at least five minutes, and often more than six.

For example, if I start at 9:30:00 and gain exactly five minutes, I'll be done at 10:15:00. I can tell from the clock and the gain, exactly how many lengths I have done. Since it takes me almost ten minutes to gain a minute, I can usually confirm the gain from the clock as well.