

## Kicking Kicks: Improving your Kick in Swimming — Wayne Goldsmith (Text)

The role of kicking in swimming is a matter for study, research, debate and discussion but one thing we do know ....

**Better Kicking = Better Swimming.** So, what are the key elements of improving your kick?

**1. Loose legs:** The key to fast swimming and fast kicking is to stay loose and relaxed. Too many swimmers think fast kicking means hard kicking. The great swimming coach Yoda once said, “unlearn what you have learned”. He meant that to progress - as a Jedi (and a swimmer) - you need to forget about trying harder when trying to go faster.

The faster you want to go, the more relaxed you have to be and this is especially true of kicking.

When trying to kick faster, keep your legs loose and relaxed. Increase your foot speed but keep your legs loose and flowing.

**2. Strong hips:** The real power in swimming is in your hips. Just look at the size of the muscles around your hips and butt compared to your ankles and feet!

Great kicking starts in the hips, then the power builds and flows down your legs...

*Hips, thighs, knees, shins, feet ... Hips, thighs, knees, shins, feet.*



Start your kicking with a small but powerful movement of your hip, then allow the power to build as the muscles around your thighs, your knees, your shins and feet all join in sequence to produce real kicking strength.

How do you practice this?

Good is not enough .. When better is possible

Go for a walk!

You kick the way you walk: **hips, thighs, knees** (slight bend), **shins, feet** working in sequence. Think about it next time you go for a walk – “*my walking is helping my swimming*”.

**3. Rhythm:** Rhythm is the crucial element in all efficient movements. Start simply. When kicking in back and free count 1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4-1-2-3-4 ... and so on, to start to develop a consistent kicking rhythm.

In Breaststroke use a rhythmic mental “chant” like “long and strong ... long and strong ... long and strong” or “reach long, kick strong ... reach long, kick strong ... reach long, kick strong” to develop flow and real rhythm.

Music really helps. When you start kicking practice, imagine a song which has the same beat and rhythm as your kicking and beat out the rhythm with your feet as you practice.

**4. Long legs:** Long legs can build kicking power more effectively than short legs.

So you have two options:

1. Plastic surgery to add some inches to your leg length, OR
2. Keep your own legs long (and loose) when you kick .. (better and cheaper option than plastic surgery).

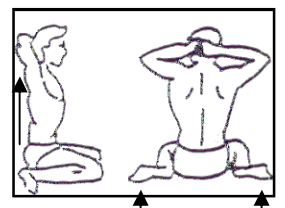


Aim to keep your legs as long as often as possible in the water. Point your toes **but without tension** and stretch your toes towards the wall behind you with each kick.

## 5. Flexibility

Flexibility allows you to get into efficient swimming positions with little or no effort.

This is not only important for minimizing injuries but in terms of kicking, being flexible means you can keep your legs long, loose and build power in a flowing sequence from hips to toes.



Work on **flexibility every day** particularly around **hips, thighs, knees, shins** and especially **feet** .. great kickers have loose, flexible ankles.

## 6. Kick as you swim: practice fast kicks:



Do some **timed kick goal sets**.

Set standards and goals and try to achieve them with the same determination and passion as you do chasing your swimming goals.

**Standards and Tags for 25 / 50 / 100 / 200 Kick Challenges** are available  
If interested: [www.nwaswimaths.com](http://www.nwaswimaths.com) [nwa@iinet.net.au](mailto:nwa@iinet.net.au)

How about these for starters?

- Kick 4 x 25 meters with fins on 45 seconds. Add the times from each 25. Aim for the combined time to be less than your PB swim time. When you can achieve this goal, make the rest period shorter, e.g. 4 x 25 meters on 40 seconds, then 4 x 25 meters on 35 seconds. Then, try it without fins!!!
- **Kick 50 meters within 10 seconds of your PB swim time.** Then aim for PB plus 9, then 8 and so on. How close can you get your 50 meter PB kick time to your 50 meter PB swim time?
- **How far can you kick in your 100 meter PB time?** 50 meters = OK; 55 meters = Fair; 60 meters = Good; 65 meters = Very Good; 70 meters = Excellent; 75 meters = Outstanding; More than 80 meters = Call Swimming Australia, collect, and tell them!!
- **How fast can you kick 200 meters of your best stroke?** (time to next highest full second; e.g. 4:29.1 = 4:30.0; why???)  
Over 5 minutes = Work harder on your kick; 5:00 – 4:45 = OK; 4:44 – 4:30 = Fair; 4:29 – 4:15 = Good; 4:14 – 4:00 = Very Good; 3:59 – 3:45 = Excellent; 3:44 – 3:30 = Outstanding; 3:29 – 3:15 = Unbelievable; 3:14 – 3:00 = World Class; Under 3 minutes = **Legend**

**Progression** comes from **working on our “weaknesses”**

## 7. Underwater Kick off the Wall: Maintaining Momentum

This is the critical area of starting well and swimming fast.

In **Fly, Back and Free** there are **three crucial kicking underwater techniques** that **must be mastered**:

- **Kicking underwater:** Underwater fly kick needs to be fast and powerful with strong kicking in both directions. The kicks should be relatively small – ideally not much deeper or wider than your hips.
- **Kicking to the surface:** As you start to move towards the surface, keep kicking fast and powerfully and deliberately. Do not allow your body to simply “pop” up to the surface.
- **Kicking into your first stroke:** Without doubt the most important part of the underwater kicking process. The speed you generate under the water must be as close as possible to the speed you want to achieve as you explode from the water into your first stroke. If racing freestyle or backstroke, aim to have your underwater fly kicking speed as close as possible to the kicking speed of your full stroke swimming.

## 8. Get Stronger: Great kicking is a combination of three (3) things:

1. **Long legs** - technique
2. **Loose legs** - flexibility
3. **Strong legs** - strength training

### *Scary Stuff*

**Ian Thorpe**  
50 F/S Kick  
push-off with  
board  
26 low



It is the combination of these three factors that makes a great kicker.

Strong legs without flexibility will not work. Loose legs without power will not work.

**You need all three** to achieve optimal kicking efficiency.

Why not ride your bike to practice or school three times a week? Take up cross country running in winter.

Go to a gym and start a leg power program with a trained and qualified instructor.

And, **most importantly**, do plenty of quality kicking with great technique in training **all year round** !

“If it’s measurable, measure it” (Bill Sweetenham, Master Coach)

**Wayne Goldsmith** [www.sportscoachingbrain.com](http://www.sportscoachingbrain.com)

Name:

Push-off start .. without fins (unless otherwise stated); timed to next higher .5 second; e.g. 13.01= 13.5

Date ▶						
<b>4x25</b> on 20 (with—w/o fins)						
<b>50m F/S</b>						
<b>100m F/S</b>						
<b>200m F/S</b>						
<b>50m Form</b>						
<b>100m Form</b>						