



Tri Swim Coach Newsletter

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Issue #47- August 30, 2005

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Shoulders

Dear Kevin,

TriSwimCoach

Thanks for all the feedback if you sent in a form last week! It gave me some great ideas for newsletters going forward. I hope you enjoyed the interview.

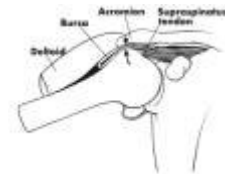
As we're getting into late-summer (late triathlon season) here, I have noticed lots of shoulder injuries popping up. Most of the time these common swimming injuries can be fixed and avoided through proper stroke mechanics and/or shoulder exercises. Let's take a look at an article I wrote last year on shoulder injuries, and a tip for freestyle that may help you avoid shoulder problems altogether!

Happy Swimming,
Kevin
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Swimming and Shoulder Injuries

by Kevin Koskella
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Most sports come with injuries to accompany them. Although swimming is, by most standards, not a sport associated with high risk of injury, it does have it's own problems. By far the biggest source of sidelining swimming injuries is the shoulder.



I was a competitive swimmer for 14 years, sometimes doing double workouts and 15,000 meters per day. I swam mostly freestyle and backstroke. I never had a shoulder problem until my college years. I had been training with pull buoy and paddles throughout my freshman year of college. I started getting a little pain in my left shoulder, but being 19 and feeling invincible, I swam through the pain and was sure that a little rest after the season would fix me right up. Well I did take the rest and ended up in a lot more pain when I resumed swimming a few months later! The doctors said it was rotator cuff tendonitis. I rehabbed and within a few more

months I was back to swimming every day, but my shoulder has never been the same since.

There are a variety of ways to give yourself a shoulder injury in swimming. "Overuse" is often what doctors will say. This is a pretty general term and doesn't help many athletes when they're trying to accomplish their goals and avoid getting hurt! Some of the other ways include:

- Improper Technique- reaching too far and over-rotating, crossing over in freestyle when pulling
- Sudden increase in training distance or intensity
- The use of pull buoys and hand paddles
- Swimming only freestyle at every workout
- Unbalanced strength development

Preventative Measures

1. One of the most important things in stroke technique when it comes to freestyle and avoiding shoulder injuries is to bend your elbows underwater during the pull. This is proper form and will keep you from putting your shoulder in an awkward position that leads to a rotator cuff problem.
2. When you've had some time away from swimming and are resuming training, always ease back into it. If, for example, you train with weights and had a 3-month layoff, you wouldn't try to max out on your bench press the first day back. The same applies to swimming. Instead of jumping back in and resuming the 5,000 meters you were doing before your break, start with something very light, like 1000 the first day, 1200 the next, etc.
3. Avoid the use of pull buoys and paddles. Although it is tempting, buoys merely give you a false sense of floatation and put unnecessary tension on your joints, especially your shoulders. Although there are paddles designed not to cause shoulder problems, most of the paddles out there are not needed in training, and will cause shoulder problems if you give it enough time.
4. Swimming only freestyle at all of your workouts may seem like a good idea if you are training for a triathlon, but I would not recommend it. First of all, you will gain more from cross training with other strokes. And most importantly, excess in any one stroke leads to a higher probability of an "overuse" injury.
5. If you breath to only one side, you will develop the muscles more on one side than the other, and this could cause a breakdown and a shoulder problem. Incorporate bilateral breathing into your workouts to avoid this. If it's extremely awkward at first, start with just breathing bilaterally in warm-up and warm-down, and slowly add it into the rest of your workouts as it becomes more comfortable.

Post-Rehab

If you are just getting over a shoulder injury and are jumping back in the pool, put on a pair of fins. Zoomers or Hydro Finz work the best. That way you are accomplishing 3 things: 1) taking some pressure off your shoulders, 2) getting a great cardiovascular workout, and 3) building strength in your legs for swimming. One "good" thing about shoulder injuries is that they force us to slow down, and give us a chance to work on

drills and stroke technique while we get back to health. And from what I've seen as a coach, many triathletes can use a little slowing down when it comes to improving their swimming!

[Click here for workout plans and The Complete Guide to Triathlon Swimming!](#)

Avoid The Crossover

One thing I see all the time in swimmers, even experienced ones, is crossing over on the pull. What I mean is, you go to take a breath and roll to the side, and your arm crosses over underwater, throwing your stroke out of rhythm. You should keep your pull to the outside. Rotate to the side to breathe as you extend your arm forward. Bend your elbow, pull back and avoid the reach over to the opposite side.



This will allow you to have a smoother overall stroke and avoid shoulder injuries!
[For a full swim training program with drills, click here.](#)

Next Issue: Surviving the Tri Start