

[IMAGE]

DON'T Keep Your Head Above Water

That lifeguard may be able to save you from drowning, but he or she probably can't protect you from a swimming injury. Shoulder overuse injuries in particular are the main culprit in swimmers - accounting for approximately one-third of all injuries in competitive swimmers each year. These injuries are common even in many recreational swimmers who think they are using the proper freestyle stroke technique.

An overview of swimming injuries, published in *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*, dispels some widely accepted techniques used by freestyle swimmers, such as keeping your head up out of the water. Some tips are offered to help you avoid pain in the pool:

- Begin each stroke with your hand entering the water finger- or pinky-first (not thumb-first).
- Continue your stroke downward in a straight line.
- Roll your body equally to each side approximately 45 degrees during strokes.
- Keep your head down in the water for proper spinal alignment (not "eyes forward" as many coaches have encouraged).

Paddling on a surfboard can help you develop the proper stroke. If you have existing shoulder pain, have a chiropractor examine you for rotator-cuff injury, shoulder impingement or other causes. Core strength (of the back, stomach and upper legs) and shoulder strength are necessary for proper stroke technique. Shoulder flexibility is also important. Yoga, abdominal strengthening exercises, and shoulder strengthening exercises (push-ups, rowing and overhead presses) can be combined with chest and shoulder stretches to keep you swimming like a fish.

Reference: Johnson JN, Gauvin J, Fredericson M. Swimming biomechanics and injury prevention. *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* 2003;31(1).

For additional information on exercise and sports, go to www.chiroweb.com/find/tellmeabout/sports.html.

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