

Waiting to Exhale

A better way to breathe while swimming

by Joanna K. Chodorowska



"Remember, your lungs are your buoy"

If you have been learning to swim like a fish, you may reconsider that idea. You are not a fish. You cannot breathe like a fish underwater. So how do you breathe more comfortably when in the water? By simply holding our breath and actually waiting to exhale. The first thing most clients tell me during their first swim lesson is that they have difficulty catching their breath. Getting to the other side of the pool means they will be panting and gasping. A panicked or hyperventilating feeling is not exactly what you want when trying to swim. Breathing can be simple if you remember a few basic principles.

The first thing to remember is forget breathing by blowing bubbles thru your mouth and nose. Yes, that helps kids become more comfortable with getting their heads into the water, but it also later becomes a problem when they actually start to try swimming. Why? Because your lungs are your 'buoy.' If you blow bubbles (exhale the air steadily as you swim) you let the air out of your buoy. This will create three problems: 1 - if you are slowly emptying the air out of your lungs, (remember, your lungs are your buoy)

then you will slowly sink; 2 - as you slowly let the air out, you are changing your buoy. The body now has to readjust to the ever-changing buoy. And 3 - as you breathe out slowly, your lungs slowly empty and send a sensation to your brain that you are running out of air. This results in a motion of throwing your head out of the water to breathe and get air. This is where that gasping feeling originates.

Is there a way to correct this and make you more comfortable with breathing? Yes. You first need to remember to keep all the air in your lungs while you are swimming. Then quickly exhale underwater as you finish your stroke (just after your hand passes your head under water). As you exhale through the mouth only, the air automatically comes back in without you actually trying. Breathing out through the nose disconnects the rebound effect. The more casually you exhale through the mouth, the more casually the air will come in. So try to do it as quickly and forcefully as possible. This type of breathing allows three things: 1- the body to relax while breathing (meaning no more kinks in your stroke); 2- your buoy is now constant so the body does not have to make readjustments during the stroke. You can actually think about the stroke technique and not about balancing. And 3 - you will feel calmer and more relaxed in the water.

Once you learn this method of breathing, you will never again be hyperventilating while swimming 50 yards in the pool. You will be able to have a conversation calmly at the wall as soon as you are finished or go and repeat a few more sets. All of my clients (including me) have changed their breathing and every one cannot believe how much of difference it has made. Swimming in a triathlon is now the easy part! Give this new breathing technique a try and see if you can be more comfortable in the water. Remember, you have to hold your breath and wait to exhale...



Joanna K Chodorowska. She is a local nutritionist and triathlete just outside of Philadelphia, PA. She is a competitive triathlete (sponsored by E-Caps, Polar USA, Speedo USA, Rudy Project and Aquaman Wetsuits) and a member of the elite team of T3 Triathlon. www.nutrition-in-motion.net. Joanna K Chodorowska is the owner of Nutrition in Motion. Contact: JoannaChodorowska@PhillyFitmagazine.com