

web workout

by Roma Hunter, Head Coach, Boston University Masters

BACK TO SCHOOL WITH BACKSTROKE (Workout designed for 25-yard pool)

Get Moving Workouts. Check out these backstroke workouts from Masters swimmer and triathlete Roma Hunter, head swim coach for Boston University Masters. A fitness instructor certified by the American College of Sports Medicine, Roma also is a former NCAA Division I swimmer at Columbia University, where her best events were 100/200 backstroke and 200 IM.

>>> By fall, many Masters swimmers who have been competing in open water and triathlons are at a high fitness level and looking for a break from endless miles of freestyle. Autumn is a perfect time to work on different strokes. This past year at BU Masters, we implemented a Stroke-a-Month program. Starting in September, we highlighted a different stroke each month, working on technique and incorporating the stroke into at least one set of our practice. With focus and daily repetition, many swimmers reaped great rewards. This year, we go back to school with a month of backstroke. Enjoy!

the workout

warm-up

Group I

10:00 (approx. 800)

Group II

10:00 (approx. 600)

Group III

10:00 (approx. 400)

drill set (900/1700)

- Use this sequence (fins optional). Kick on back, Kick on left side, Kick on right side, L-drill left side, L-drill right side, 3 strokes/5 kick L-drill. See *Workout Notes for details*.

2x (6x75)

Each 75, 50 drill/25 swim on
10-15 sec. rest (900 yards)

2x (6x50)

Each 50, 25 drill/25 swim on
10-15 sec. rest (600 yards)

2x (6x50)

Each 50, 25 drill/25 swim on
10-15 sec. rest (600 yards)

main set (2050/3750)

200 back @ 3:00
25 easy free @ 0:30
2x100 back @ 1:30
25 easy free @ 0:30
4x50 back @ 1:00
25 easy free @ 0:30
Repeat 3X
(2025 yards)

200 back @ 3:30
25 easy free @ 0:35
2x100 back @ 1:45
25 easy free @ 0:35
4x50 back @ 1:10
25 easy free @ 0:35
Repeat 3X
(2025 yards)

200 back @ 4:00
25 easy free @ 0:40
2x100 back @ 2:00
25 easy free @ 0:40
4x50 back @ 1:20
25 easy free @ 0:40
Repeat 2X
(1350 yards)

sprint set

- **All backstroke.** Use this sequence the prescribed number of times.
- 6 underwater dolphin kicks + 2 strokes sprint + easy
- 6 underwater dolphin kicks + 4 strokes sprint + easy
- **Sprint** (optimal # underwater dolphin kicks) easy

5x (4x25) on 0:30
(500 yards)

4x (4x25) on 0:35
(400 yards)

3x (4x25) on 0:40
(300 yards)

warm-down

300

200

200

total yards

4550

3850

2850

web workout

Workout Notes

>>> **Warm-Up:** This is a general, continuous warm-up, mixing up strokes, drills and kicking as you please. Stay relaxed and ease into it. The average swimmer does 400-800 yards, but do more if time permits.

>>> **Drill Set:** As with all drills, do not rush. Make sure you know what aspect of the stroke you are working on, and use the prescribed swim, following the drill to incorporate the sensation into your stroke. Fins are optional for proficient backstrokers, and strongly recommended for those struggling with body position.

>>> **Kick on back.** Think about body balance and alignment, making sure to kick gently. Kick with arms overhead, hands together in tight streamline, biceps squeezing behind your ears. Your body should take a slight banana shape, with belly slightly sucked in towards the navel (core engaged), pelvis tipped slightly inwards, and upper back pressing into the water. Your chest should be slightly concave. By pressing the lung area gently into the water, your hips and body will naturally rise to the surface, giving the sensation of lightness (buoyancy is our friend). More commonly, Masters swimmers struggle to stay up by arching their backs to lift their bellies out of the water. This is counterproductive. Kick from the hips with relatively straight but relaxed legs, toes pointed. Take a peek at your knees. They should not be breaking the surface, but your feet may be visible, churning (not thrashing) the water.

>>> **Kick on side.** Again, think of body balance and alignment. Backstroke is not swum on the back, but from side-to-side, like freestyle, merely transitioning via the back. As such, proper body position and kick is critical. Again, you want to maintain an active core, your hips traveling with your upper body in unison as you rotate (not twisting), and hips high in the water for that feeling of lightness. When kicking on the left side, hold your left arm overhead, hand under the surface of the water, reaching forward from your shoulder, palm facing down towards the bottom of the pool. Your right arm should be flush against your body at the side, forearms wrapping around your abdomen and hugging your body. This way it is less prone to dangling, allows you to feel your abs working, and aids in maintaining banana shape. Face straight towards the ceiling with your chin nearly at your right shoulder. Your right hip should lie just beneath the surface of the water. Reverse for opposite side.

>>> **L-drill.** This drill takes side kicking to the next level. When performing L-drill on the left side, maintain same position as described in the side kicking drill except for right arm, which extends straight from the shoulder up toward the ceiling (perpendicular to body), thumb facing towards head in the direction of your recovery. Your left and right arms should form

the letter "L." Once again, make sure to press your chest cavity (in this case, the left lung) gently into the water. A common error is to lift the right arm and the shoulder with it too high out of the water, causing the back to arch and legs to sink. This is a tough drill. Keep at it and it will come.

>>> **3 strokes + kick in L-drill position for 5-count.** Swim three strokes then pause on your side in L-drill position for five kicks (more as needed). Repeat. This drill adds the rotation in to the equation, adding the extra kicks to regroup and reestablish perfect body position on your side. Maintain an active core and make sure your hips travel with your upper body as you rotate from side to side. No twisting.

>>> Main Set:

- 200s are swum with six-beat kick (i.e., three per each individual arm stroke or six per stroke cycle).
- Build the 100s to 75% effort.
- 50s are at maximum effort.
- Repeat two to three times as prescribed. Second time around can be swum all freestyle, adjusting intervals accordingly.

>>> **Sprint Set.** This set works on tight off-the-wall streamline, underwater dolphin kicks, and explosiveness. Fast turnover, but not at the expense of form.

>>> **Warm Down.** Easy general swimming. A must, especially after sprint set.

>>> **Technique Tips.** It is important to note that in backstroke, your arms must remain at all times in the front plane of your body. Imagine a plane slicing your body in half from the crown of your head to the soles of your feet, dividing your body into a front portion (face) and back portion (rear). At all parts during the backstroke stroke cycle your arms remain in the front plane of your body. All swimmers do this during the recovery phase, but many reach way behind their bodies during the pull phase in an effort to get their hand deep in the water. Reaching too far messes with body alignment (counters that nice concave banana shape we've been talking about), puts your arms in a very weak position to grab/pull water, and puts incredible strain on your shoulders. Although you want your hand/forearm deep in the water for a powerful catch and pull, you do so by rotating your body and not by wrenching your arm.

