Choosing dryland cords boils down to one important question: How do you plan to use them? There are hundreds of movements that can be performed with the cords, some of them specific to swimming, many others not.

Testers who use cords for routines that work different muscle groups in both upper and lower body were more likely to choose cords that come with roller handles or a variety of attachments.

Testers who use cords for one or two swim-specific exercises prefer cords with paddles, which more closely simulate swimming movements.

What Are They Good For?

SWIMMER asked Coach Susan Ingraham with Masters of South Texas how she uses dryland resistance cords, both personally and with her swimmers. She responded:

- Primarily to prevent shoulder injuries and rehabilitate injured shoulders
- To catch technique flaws on land, such as dropped elbows or breaking in the wrists, while encountering resistance
- To strengthen specific muscles for her older swimmers
- To provide a simulated swim workout when traveling or unable to get to the pool
Single Cord Design

1. **AQUA SPHERE RESISTANCE CORDS**

$30 | aquasphereswim.com

This is the only cord tested that utilizes a bungee rather than rubber tubing to provide resistance. Bungees can offer smoother resistance than tubing, but this particular bungee is fairly thin, and stronger testers feel this cord is too light to offer enough resistance.

Testers loved that this modular set allows for attachment of either the comfortable foam-covered roller handles or neoprene ankle straps, and it all comes with a small net bag that can easily be stashed in luggage or a swim bag. The cord is plenty long enough for versatility in movements, and with the ankle straps and the cord wrapped around a pool’s handrail, the unit can be used for stationary swimming.

2. **FINIS DRYLAND CORD**

$20 | finisinc.com

Finis cords come in three resistance levels. Testers liked the high-quality construction of the Finis cords. The rubber tubing is secured with beads and one-piece plastic sleeve-and-loop attachments, with durable nylon handle straps and comfortable foam-covered plastic roller handles. Finis hit the mark with these cords—a good product at a good price.

3. **SWIM OUTLET.COM SPORTI RESISTANCE BANDS**

$7–11

Testers liked the comfort of these inexpensive, basic cords. The handgrips are larger and more comfortable than the Finis handles and the nylon webbing rolls more smoothly inside the handles. They come in five resistance levels and have the most basic construction: a rubber tube, handles secured with beads and grommets, and nylon straps with soft foam-covered plastic roller handles.

At 44 inches, however, the rubber tubing is about half the length of all the other cords tested. This limits the number of exercises that can be performed and the options for attachment, because the short cord can’t be wrapped around a larger object, such as tree trunk, and still be long enough to use. Several testers remarked that the Sporti cords could be a good back-up set, and ideal for travel, because of their smaller size and low price, but most preferred the longer tubes of the other brands.
Swim Bag: Dryland Resistance Cords

Double Cords with Single Attachment Point

4. KIEFER DRYLAND POWER-CORDS WITH HANDLES
$29 | kiefer.com
Kiefer’s double cord/single anchor point cords are available in four resistance levels. The rubber tubing is knotted and glued securely at the ends, and the nylon webbing is of basic quality. Testers disliked the plastic roller handles, which are uncomfortable when dry and slippery when wet. These lower quality fixtures allow Kiefer to price them more economically than some of the other products, however.

5. KIEFER DRYLAND POWER-CORDS WITH PADDLES
$30 | kiefer.com
These cords are exactly like Kiefer’s PowerCords with Handles, only with paddles at the ends. Kiefer repurposed their swimming hand paddles, which presented two problems for testers: The paddles are curved, which most testers found to be useful only for backstroke (see the hand paddle review in the May-June 2010 issue of SWIMMER), and the nylon straps are placed too closely together, which results in chafing on the sides of the hands.

6. NZ MANUFACTURING STRECH-CORDZ WITH PADDLES
$45 | nzmf.com
These paddles were tester favorites. NZ paddles appear to have been made specifically for use with resistance cords and are slightly flexible, and wide enough to accommodate any size hands with comfort. The nylon webbing is of higher quality—thicker and softer—than any of the other brands tested. Anyone serious about dryland resistance training will appreciate the superior design and quality of NZ’s StrechCordz line.

7. NZ MANUFACTURING STRECHCORDZ WITH LEG STRAPS
$40 | nzmf.com
NZ Manufacturing’s high quality is also evident in their ankle strap model. The nylon cuffs and Velcro closures secured the straps on testers of all shapes and sizes. NZ also includes a pamphlet with all their resistance cords showing many different exercises that can be done, which testers found helpful when using the ankle straps.

Resistance Cords with Extras

8. NZ MANUFACTURING STRECHCORDZ BREASTSTROKE MACHINE
$54 | nzmf.com
The breaststrokers in our cadre of testers loved the Breaststroke Machine. Essentially, it provides two separate anchor points for each hand, offering resistance from two angles. This allows for a closer imitation of breaststroke, with resistance to the outward and upward motions. Testers found this impossible to duplicate with the single attachment point of other products tested.

There is not as much flexibility in attachment to a fixed object with the Breaststroke Machine compared to the basic stretch cords. A chain link fence or the handrails of a diving board were the best options at our testing pool. The nylon web straps looped for use with the handrails, and were unclipped and set aside when clipping the cords to the fence. To be effective, the attachment points need to be properly spaced, and instructions are included.

9. LANE GAINER HALO SWIM TRAINING KIT
$125 | lanegainer.com
The Halo trainer is a good way to teach good technique to beginners, as it is impossible to drop the elbows or use bad form at the beginning of the stroke. Two of our product testers teach swimming technique to a group of triathletes, and they found this device helpful in reinforcing the concepts of high elbow, proper entry and proper rotation with their swimmers.

Breaststrokers who have trouble with dropped elbows may also find that repeats done with resistance and the high elbows required to get around the template will strengthen their pull in the water and keep everything out in front.

The Halo Kit is composed of a metal plate that secures to a bench (not included), a wide plastic template that attaches to the front of the metal plate, a single resistance cord with flat handles and a foam cushion for the metal plate. A metronome is included with the kit to set the tempo for repetitions. Some room is required for getting the bench the proper distance away from a fixed object where the resistance cord will be attached. Testers found that a garden-variety weight bench worked well. Also tried with varying degrees of success were locker room benches (a little too low) and bleachers (not very comfy).

Lane Gainer offers a choice of six template sizes when ordering the Halo Kit, with the ability to purchase other sizes, and three different resistance levels of cords. The cord handles consist of flat narrow paddles, rather than round roller-type handles. Also available from Lane Gainer is a complete training system that includes a bench.
Resistance Cord Basics
SINGLE CORDS (AQUA SPHERE, FINIS, SPORTI)
PROS:
- Versatility in attachment. Single cords can be thrown around a flagpole, chain link fence, tree trunk, etc.
- Flexibility and fluid, free-form movement for swimmers who do mixed routines.
- Single cords can be wrapped around something wide and crossed over for different angle of resistance to work the short-axis strokes.

CONS
- The middle of the cord, where it rubs against the anchor object, will wear out sooner than double cords with a single attachment point.
- Harder to focus on a single arm, because the resistance is always against the other arm as well as the anchor point.
- Can’t drop one cord and work with the other.

DOUBLE CORDS WITH SINGLE ATTACHMENT POINT (KIEFER, NZ STRECHCORDZ)
PROS:
- Attachment point is secure and provides a single anchor point for each arm or leg so focus on a particular muscle or limb is more attainable.
- One cord can be dropped to work on a single cord.

CONS:
- Double cords don’t offer as many options with attachment points—limited to a pole with an open top to hang the strap, such as a fence post, or a pole thin enough in diameter, such as a backstroke flag pole, to loop through and still have enough cord to work with.
- Some swimmers prefer the ability to feel what is going on with the other limb being worked, which is easier with a single cord.
The products we tested had three options for end hardware. Aqua Sphere’s basic model comes with rollers and ankle straps. NZ StrechCordz offers a modular kit that includes paddles, rollers and ankle straps for maximum versatility.

ROLLERS
For swimmers who perform a variety of exercises with resistance cords, the foam rollers are comfortable and versatile, although they should not be gripped tightly when performing swim-specific exercises.

PADDLES
Paddles are best for swim-specific exercises. The paddle allows the hand to perform as it does in the water. Serious swimmers will appreciate the ability to mimic their stroke mechanics on land. Coaches can closely supervise and correct positioning while the swimmer encounters resistance.

ANKLE STRAPS
Ankle straps allow for different exercises to work the lower body, including glutes, hamstrings, thighs, calves, adductors and abductors. They can also be attached to a handrail and used for stationary swimming in smaller pools.