

▼ BETTER FITNESS

# Develop the Feel for Proper Form

A self-proclaimed swim addict, **Jacki Hirsty**, a personal aquatics trainer with Swimsmart in Providence, R.I., has been competing for a whopping 40 years. As an instructor, Hirsty focuses on developing and imprinting the feel for proper swim form in her athletes.

She believes the key to success in any triathlon or swim event is to overcome poor technique, which often develops when swimmers emulate other swimmers' strokes.

"I believe that swimming is all technique-based," Hirsty said. "When I work with clients, I like to avoid too many workouts and instead focus solely on technique by asking them to do the same stroke down the pool again and again until we make it perfect. Triathletes avoid it like the plague."

Despite a long swim history, Hirsty is constantly studying and testing new theories while developing improved technique as she trains and competes. Here are her most effective swim workouts.

Find Jacki Hirsty at [Swimsmart.info](http://Swimsmart.info) or e-mail her at [Jacki@swimsmart.info](mailto:Jacki@swimsmart.info)



## Workout No. 1: Drills and Technique

“Swimming is not a skill that one acquires and improves with repeated bashing of the water for miles and miles. Most of us are trying to replicate what we see others do and I can guarantee that what you see is not what you feel.”

### 1 Find Your Balance

The water will support you—if you allow it to. Your head is a 19-pound counterweight. Use it by dropping it until your legs rise to the surface.

**Drill:** Drive your head down in the water as you swim, then lift it all the way out, water-polo style. Find a happy medium that keeps the back of your neck long.

### 2 Let It All Out

Your breathing must be constant and rhythmic. No holding your breath!

**Drill:** While floating on your back with a gentle kick, inhale and start rolling your hips over, leaving your head and shoulders facing up. When you are twisted at the waist, allow the rest of your body to come around

and float face down. Slowly exhale as you begin to roll over with your hips only, then the rest of your body, until you are on your back again. Repeat.

### 3 Catch Up

Your pull is strongest when your shoulders are square to the water. You must wait for one arm to completely finish the cycle before initiating the next arm pull.

**Drill:** Grab a two-foot long piece of PVC pipe and hold it with both hands on the ends out in front of you. One arm takes a stroke, cycles around through recovery and grabs the end of the pipe before the other arm strokes. Eventually lose the pipe while maintaining the same form.

### 4 Just Roll With It

Your power and your breath come from your hip roll, not a shoulder roll. Shoulders are your stability. Keep your head near the surface where there is air.

**Drill:** One-arm swimming. As the stroking arm completes the underwater pull, roll your

hips—almost vertically—to allow your hand to clear the water into the recovery phase.

### 5 Use Your Fingertips

High elbows, coupled with your hip roll, allow your arms to recover relaxed and your big muscles to power your stroke.

**Drill:** Allow your fingers to drag through the water during recovery. This forces you to keep your elbows high. Shove the elbows forward toward the end of the pool to engage the lats and help roll those hips to the side.

### 6 Push When You Pull

The underwater pull is actually a push. Reach over the water you want to move and push it from in front. Keep your elbows bent at 90 degrees and imagine that the pool is only 18 inches deep. That's where you are strongest.

**Drill:** In deep water, put your hands on the gutter and push yourself up out of the pool. That's the same action you use in the pull to move the water.

# ON THE RADAR [ NORTHEAST ]

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## Workout No. 2: Incorporate the Drills into a Workout

Hirsty's Swim Sets

### Warm-up

200-300 easy warm-up swimming

| SET 1    | More Warm-up                 | Rest | Set Distance |
|----------|------------------------------|------|--------------|
| 2 times: | 25 drill                     | :10  |              |
|          | 25 kick - 25 drill           | :15  |              |
|          | 25 kick - 25 drill - 25 swim | :20  | 300          |

### SET 2

|                             |     |  |
|-----------------------------|-----|--|
| 200 all drills              | :20 |  |
| 200 / 150 drills - 50 swim  | :20 |  |
| 200 / 100 drills - 100 swim | :20 |  |
| 200 / 50 drills - 150 swim  | :20 |  |
| 200 swim                    |     |  |

Rest 1 minute before starting 100s

|                         |     |      |
|-------------------------|-----|------|
| 100 swim - find an even | :10 |      |
| 100 and sustainable     | :10 |      |
| 100 pace you can hold   | :10 |      |
| 100 for all 4           | :10 | 1400 |

### SET 3

|          |                           |     |     |
|----------|---------------------------|-----|-----|
| 6 times: | 25 easy swim using drills | :10 |     |
|          | 25 fast                   | :10 | 300 |



### TOP SHOP

#### Toga Bike Shop

Upper West Side  
110 West End Ave.  
(Between 64th and  
65th streets)  
New York, N.Y.

[Togabikes.com](http://Togabikes.com)

Toga Bikes has been serving the New York City metro area for more than 30 years. *New York Magazine* voted it one of the best bike shops in the U.S. in 2003, a significant accomplishment in a city known for its fierce business competition and notoriously rushed clientele. Toga serves the cycling and triathlon communities with two additional locations—Gotham Bikes downtown and another Toga Bikes in Upper Nyack. Providing a wide range of services from 3D Retül bike fits to a basic fit on their customized Fit-Cycle, the Toga staff are prepared to help you get what you need, and fast. Co-owned by **Luis Viera** and **David Nazaroff**, Toga also does business on the Web, with everything online available for in-store pickup. In addition, the store offers yoga classes on Mondays to start the week off limber, spin classes four days a week and core and weight training classes six days a week. Toga is an authorized Specialized retailer, and is also home to products from Cannondale, Giant, Electra, Bianchi, Guru and more. [Togabikes.com](http://Togabikes.com)

### TRAIL GUIDE

#### The Lake Quannapowitt Loop Wakefield, Mass.

Location: Corner of Lowell Street and Main Street. Parking available.

Just a short distance from Beantown is the quaint town of Wakefield, home to Lake Quannapowitt. The lake is somewhat of a local secret, but Melrose, Reading and Wakefield residents can be seen running, biking or walking its three-mile perimeter daily. Lake Quannapowitt's history dates back to the 1800s, when it was used to provide water for residents. The trail around the lake is mostly sidewalk and pavement, making it a great option for a fast, flat route. Spring and summer are perfect for people watching and a workout. [Visitingnewengland.com/wakefield](http://Visitingnewengland.com/wakefield)

On July 10, the lake and the town of Wakefield host the 12th annual Take the Lake 5K. Register early, as this event attracts hundreds of participants each year. [TaketHELake5K.com](http://TaketHELake5K.com)

**Word To The Wise**  
If you prefer solo, uncrowded workouts, then the lake's swift moving loop might not be your thing. This lake trail is better suited to the social runner.