

Swim Serpentine

Half-mile pool training plan

New to open water swimming? If so, you've come to the right place, as this training plan offers plenty of helpful advice for beginners!

Open water swimming can be very liberating, and you don't even have to be an excellent swimmer to do it. So long as you can swim and have some fitness, a half-mile swim (800 metres) is achievable.

Most people swim front crawl, as this is the easiest stroke to master and will get you round the course the fastest – but breaststroke is fine too. We wouldn't recommend you swim backstroke, as you won't be able to see where you're going.

Training in a pool

There are a variety of training sessions and skills sets for you to try below. If you're new to swimming or looking to improve, it's also a good idea to find out if your local pool holds any adult swimming sessions. These sessions are often welcoming and a great way to progress your technique and fitness quickly, especially if there are swimming coaches on the poolside providing set sessions for you.

A swimming session should consist of a warm up, main set, contrast set and warm down.

WARM UP

Gradually warm up your arms and lungs as you increase your pace over some short distances.

MAIN SET

Typically, a target distance broken down into shorter distances with short recovery times to help you work on your pace. For example, the target may be 1,000m, so a simple session would be to swim 10 x 100m with one-minute rest between each four lengths (in a 25m pool). This way you can swim faster for the duration of the 100m than you would be able to over a straight 1,000m swim.

CONTRAST SET

After a main session, the contrast set throws in some drills with perhaps some kick or stroke work.

WARM DOWN

A reverse of the warm up, reduce your speed and think about technique.

Sample Main Sets

BIG STEP PYRAMID (700m)	Swim 25m, 5 sec rest, swim 50m, 10 sec rest, swim 75m, 10 sec rest, swim 100m, 15 sec rest, swim 125m, 20 sec rest, swim 150m, 30 sec rest, swim 175m, 30 sec rest.
BUILD SET (700m)	Swim 25m, 5 sec rest. Repeat three more times. Swim 50m, 10 sec rest. Repeat three more times. Swim 100m, 15 sec rest. Repeat three more times.
4 X 200M SET (800m)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 x 25m (5 sec rest at the end of each length), plus 30 sec rest at the end of each set. 4 x 50m (10 sec rest after each 50m), plus 30 sec rest at the end of each set. 2 x 100m (15 sec rest after each 100m), plus 30 sec rest at the end of each set. 1 x 200m, plus 30 sec rest at the end.
SAMPLE CONTRAST SET	4 x 50m kick using a kick board, then 4 x 50m as a 25m drill, practicing one part of the swim stroke, then a 25m swim.

Sample Basic Drills

SINGLE ARM SWIM	Hold one arm out in front of you and swim using only the other arm. Think about getting a good pull through the water with each stroke. Alternate the arms you use for this drill.
SIX ARM SWITCH	Complete six single arm strokes on one side, then six on the other. The aim is the same as above – to get a good pull through the water with each stroke – but use your hips when switching from one arm to the other to create a body roll.
CATCH UP	Make sure one hand is always in the water out in front of you. The 'glide hand' in the water stays there until the 'moving hand' touches the water – then they switch. This is good for lengthening your stroke for long distance swimming. It should be nice and smooth as you always have one hand stretched out in front of you.
CHICKEN WING	As you swim, touch your right thumb under your right arm pit and left thumb under your left armpit. This helps create a high elbow when swimming.
THREE-POINT TOUCH (GOOD FOR WARM UP AND WARM DOWN)	<p>Touch three points on each stroke:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Catch up as above. Touch your thigh with your thumb – this should be at the end of your stroke, as low as you can on your leg without twisting your body. Under your arm pit. <p>With practice, this should be nice and smooth and a good way to get your stroke feeling better after a hard session.</p>
CLENCHED FIST	Keep your fist clenched during the whole stroke. The aim of this drill is to use your forearm while swimming to appreciate the power your hand creates when pulling through the water. Try and keep this slow and think about keeping a high elbow throughout the stroke.
KICK ON SIDE	Placing your left arm in front of you, swim on your left side, kicking for one length, then change sides. The aim of this drill is to create good balance in the water and get used to rotating onto your side when swimming.

Additional half-mile swim sets

	WARM UP	MAIN SET	CONTRAST SET	WARM DOWN	TOTAL DISTANCE
SET 1	Swim 200m to warm up, mixing the strokes	6 x 100m, 30 sec rest. Aim to swim at the same pace for all six 100m segments	Swim 100m as a 25m kick, 25m drill	Swim 100m to warm down	2,000m
SET 2	Swim 200m to warm up, mixing the strokes	Swim 200m to warm up, mixing the strokes Swim 200m to warm up, mixing the strokes Swim 200m to warm up, mixing the strokes	25m kick, 25m swim x 4	Swim 200m to warm down	1,000m (when you feel stronger, add 4 x 100m to the main set with the same amount of rest between 100m segments)
SET 3	Swim 300m to warm up, mixing the strokes	4 x 200m with 45 sec rest between 200m segments	100m of any drill, 50m kick x 2	Swim 100m to warm down	1,500m
SET 4	Swim 150m then a 50m drill to warm up	Swim 25m, 10 sec rest, swim 50m, 10 sec rest, swim 75m, 10 sec rest Swim 100m, 15 sec rest, swim 125m, 15 sec rest, swim 150m, 15 sec rest Swim 175m, 20 sec rest, swim 200m, 20 sec rest	Swim 100m, 15 sec rest, swim 125m, 15 sec rest, swim 150m, 15 sec rest	Swim 200m to warm down	1,300m
SET 5	Swim 200m any stroke to warm up	Swim 800m as follows: Swim 200m, 20 sec rest, swim 100m, 15 sec rest Swim 50m, 10 sec rest x 4 Swim 25m, 5 sec rest x 8	4 x 75m as 25m drill, 25m swim, 25m drill, 10 sec rest	Swim 200m to warm down	1,500m
SET 6	Swim 300m of any stroke to warm up	Time yourself over 800m. Try to set a good pace from the start that you can hold for the whole 800m	8 x 25m alternate drill kick	Swim 200m to warm down	1,500m