

Flexibility for Butterfly

By

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Many age group swimmers don't have the shoulder flexibility to correctly perform butterfly arm recovery. Because of this lack of flexibility, these swimmers work harder, go slower and in some cases are at higher risk for injury when performing butterfly compared to their more flexible counterparts. The problem is lack of shoulder range of motion behind the back or in the scapular plane.



Two age group swimmers performing butterfly. The swimmer on the left lacks the flexibility to properly recover. The swimmer on the right has flexible shoulders. This flexibility allows proper stroke mechanics.

There are a number of exercises that a swimmer can perform to increase their shoulder flexibility that will help all of their strokes. One routine in particular, can help increase shoulder flexibility with just a few minutes, twice a day. This stretching exercise is the pole or towel stretch. For this stretch, after warming up the muscles (i.e. with arm circles or swimming), swimmers grasp a towel or pole with both hands and, without bending their elbows, rotate the pole from the front of their bodies, overhead to the back, and then forward again. As shoulder flexibility increases, the hands are moved closer together on the pole or towel. The ultimate goal should be to do the exercise with the hands slightly more than shoulder width apart. If swimmers use a solid object, like a pole or PVC pipe for this stretch, they can motivate themselves by marking their progress over time as their hands get closer to the center on the pole or pipe.



A shoulder stretch using a towel or rod can quickly increase shoulder flexibility, which will improve a swimmer's strokes

Dr. Arata is a Professor of Biomechanics and author of the book, *The Parents' Guide to Swimming*. For more information on swimming flexibility or parent-related swimming information, go to www.swimmingparent.com