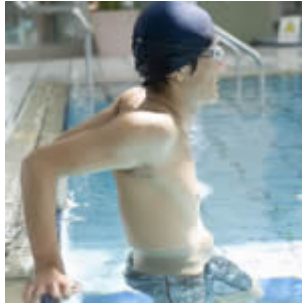


# Simple Swim-Specific Poolside Exercises

By Alex Kostich, for "Active.com"



*Poolside dips put you at less risk for an injury than doing them in the weight room.*

With summer here and longer daylight hours a welcome change, many of us may be hard-pressed to continue our strength training indoors at the local gym.

Warm weather and fresh air beckons, so why spend time lifting weights under the same fluorescent lights that flicker above us in our day jobs?

[United States Masters Swimming](#) has addressed a series of pool-based strength-training exercises that should be especially popular during the hot summer months.

The list inspired me to expand upon those exercises and offer a guide to pool-side strength-training drills that could not only double as an effective weight-lifting substitute, but could also provide a safe segue into strength-training for the uninitiated.

All exercises below are to be executed within the confines of a swimming pool, and most do not require a conventional lap pool ([hotel-dwellers](#) and kidney-shaped-pool owners take note). In many instances, one does not even need to know how to swim, though the ability to rely on the water's buoyancy is helpful in making some of the exercises easier at first.

## 1. Tricep Lifts

Sit on the edge of a swimming pool with your legs in the water. Place your hands on either side of your thighs, fingers curled over the edge of the pool. Bracing yourself, lift your body up from its sitting position so that your thighs and backside are raised a few inches from the deck. Remain in this elevated "sitting" position, taking care not to sway back and forth.

Keep your thighs parallel to the deck (you may have a tendency to lean forward as it gets harder to hold the position). Hold the position for 15 seconds, then rest for 15 seconds. Repeat three times (at first). Eventually you can work your way up to longer "holds" and/or more reps.

This exercise strengthens the same muscles used when you practice dumbbell tricep extensions in the weight room. Tricep strength is especially relevant in the freestyle and butterfly strokes, where it is needed in order to lengthen and finish out the end of the underwater pull.

## 2. Dips

From a sitting position at the edge of the pool (as in the tricep lifts of Exercise 1), slide your body down into the water until your elbows are at a 90-degree angle (with your hands palms-down on the deck), and your spine and legs are flush

with the poolside. Slowly raise your body up until your elbows straighten out, then bring your body back down into the water.

Make sure to "dip" up and down slowly and methodically—avoid dipping down so far that it hurts and you can't raise yourself back up (this can cause shoulder strains and muscle tears).

Poolside "dips" are no different than the ones you may have practiced on dry land on a set of raised parallel bars, but the advantage is that your body weight is somewhat reduced by the water and you are at less risk of injury.

You can also repeat more reps more easily, strengthening and toning your shoulders without breaking them down as much as you would in the gym.

### **3. Pullouts**

Depending on your strength and comfort level in the water, start this exercise in shallow or deep water (four feet deep or six feet deep, respectively), facing the pool's gutter. Placing your hands shoulder-width apart on the deck above you, pull your body straight out of the water, keeping your elbows high.

Once your arms are extended and your upper body is perpendicular to the deck (which should now be at waist-level), lower yourself back down into the water with a controlled motion. Repeat in rapid succession, 10 times. Rest. Repeat again as necessary.

This exercise mimics the underwater pull of both freestyle and butterfly, with an emphasis on correct form if you remember to keep your elbows high. At the fully elevated level, you are also working your triceps as in Exercise 1, which will help you to finish your stroke rather than cut it short when you're fatigued.

### **4. Abdominal Crunches**

For this exercise, locate a pool where the deck is a foot above water level (this is pretty standard). Lying on your back and floating in the water (perpendicular to the poolside), put your legs from the knees down up on the deck, so you are in a sitting position. This way, your backside should be "sitting" against the poolside wall while your back is floating parallel to the bottom of the pool.

Begin doing wet "abdominal crunches," or sit-ups, curling your chest up toward your knees as far as you can go. Return to your starting position in a controlled motion, taking care not to crash back into the water. You can keep your hands crossed over your chest. Do several sets of 15, then work your way up to six sets of 25 or four sets of 50.

This exercise strengthens the abdominal core, and helps improve overall body position while maximizing flip-turn efficiency. It is also a stretching exercise for your lower back/spine, and you will feel it elongating your vertebrae especially if you spend your days sitting at a desk.

## 5. Swim With Paddles

This exercise requires swimming ability. Add wearing a pair of hand paddles to your existing swim regimen, for 25 percent to 30 percent of your daily yardage. Training with paddles tones shoulders and upper arms, resulting in that sought-after "swimmer's physique" (while avoiding a bulky body-building look).

Be careful not to use large paddles too soon (they come in many different sizes), as this can contribute to shoulder problems (rotator cuff inflammation, tendonitis).

Dolphin kicking on your back is a great way to strengthen abs while toning gluteal and thigh muscles. With your arms in a streamline position, push off the wall and dolphin kick on your back with your legs together, moving as one, in an undulating motion.

You can vary the exercise by dolphin-kicking on your side and adding fins to the drill. Fins (Zoomers, Hydrofinz, etc.) lengthen the undulating motion and place more emphasis on strengthening the quad muscles. This is also a good way to stretch cycling- and running-fatigued leg muscles that have a tendency to cramp up and result in IT-band problems for triathletes.

While these drills may not cover the broad range of machine-based exercises found in your local weight room, they offer an alternative to strength-training in the summer months. These exercises are also a safe way to develop certain muscles for those individuals looking to start a weight-training program.

By using the water's buoyancy to help you execute the drills in a methodical, controlled and correct way, you learn the importance of proper form and muscle control; two elements necessary for effective and injury-free strength-training.

*A former swimmer at Stanford University, Alex Kostich has stayed strong in the sport at the elite level even while maintaining a day job. The three-time Pan-American Games gold medalist still competes in - and wins - numerous open-water races around the world each year, as well as competing in the occasional triathlon and running race.*