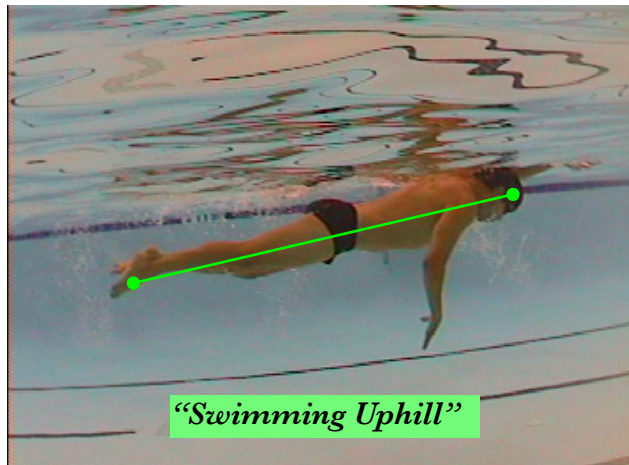


Body Position and Balance

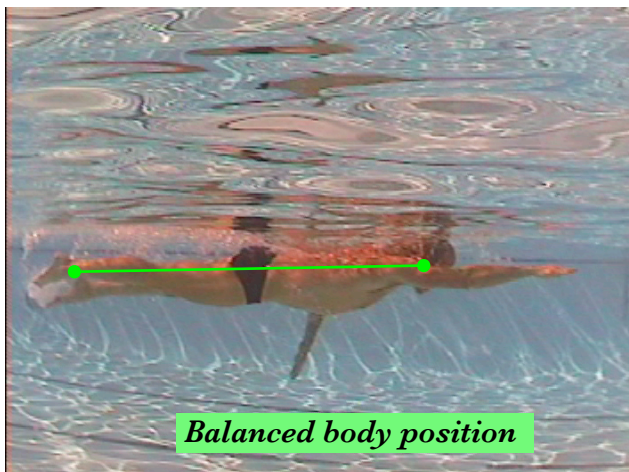
The key to swimming efficiently.

Do you feel like you are struggling to get across the pool? Are you exhausted after ten to twenty laps? Do you feel like you are not improving despite frequent trips to the pool and trudging thru the workouts?

If you have answered “yes” to any of these questions, your most likely culprit is the wrong body position, otherwise known as swimming “uphill.” The body should be completely parallel to the surface of the water with the legs no lower than the shoulders and torso. This is known as balance in the water, learning to push the sternum forward and moving your center of gravity up. (Think about where your center of gravity must be to paddle on top of a surf board.) This allows the body to travel forward with the least amount of resistance from the water. If the legs are lower than the rest of the body, a lot of water must be pushed forward in front of the swimmer for him to make any forward progress.



For a swimmer to achieve this ideal, streamlined body position, the swimmer must hold his core or spine line straight. This means being able to lengthen the vertebrae as if trying to make oneself as tall as possible. For those who are relatively new to distance swimming, this can take a lot of concentration as well as practice, both in the water and out. Weak inner core muscles (the small muscles closest to the spine, not the six pack everyone covets) will make achieving a long spine line very difficult. Pilates (especially exercises like the plank, performed both forwards and sideways) is one the best ways to work on weak core muscles, not crunches, if you want to move smoothly and efficiently thru the water.



Holding the head too high out the water can also lead to body position problems and uphill swimming. For every inch the head is too high, the hips drop about six inches and the feet drop about a foot. (This is what happens typically during sighting in open water, and why

sighting can be so tiring.) Try to keep the head down low enough in the water so that only the very top and back part of the head can be seen above the water level. The ears and entire face should be submerged. When breathing, one half the face and the ear closest to the bottom of the pool, should be completely submerged. A common mistake is to lift the head while breathing, and this pushes the hips and legs down and causes the swimmer to struggle for air

Another way of expressing this completely horizontal and streamlined position is to move thru the smallest possible hole in the water. We will address this area again in the next article with a discussion of proper kick technique; it is impossible to achieve good body position and balance without it.