

Get Your Freestyle Flip Turns Race Ready!

**By Danielle E. Newton,
Coach for Durham Area Masters Aquatics (DAMA)**

Whether you are a pure sprint freestyle lover, or a mid-distance/distance freestyle fanatic, chances are, you could stand to improve your flip turn speed and/or technique. During a typical swim practice, the average swimmer probably has the chance to perform up to 100 (or more) flip turns, maybe less if the practice is focusing on the short axis strokes. Despite having a 100 chances to work on bettering your flip turns, most swimmers choose to “just go through the motion” and use each flip turn as a chance to recover (long glide into the wall, slow turn, feet planted on wall for 2 seconds, looking around – seeing where your lane buddies are, doing a slow push-off, poor streamline, etc.) If that describes your typical flip turn, then read on! Let’s work on improving your flip turn technique and speed!

6 key points everyone should know for executing quality flip turns:

1. Every flip turn begins with your chin and follows through your core/abs. As you approach the wall, tuck your chin to the chest and flip your legs over using your core muscles (not your arms!)
2. Flip straight over onto the wall. Plant your feet so that your toes are pointing upwards. Push off on your back, and then twist over to face the bottom of the pool during your streamline glide and kicks.
3. Streamline dolphin kicks (SDK) are the best way to maintain speed during your push off. But if your SDK’s are weak/poor, your best bet is rapid flutter kicking.
4. Begin your first stroke with the Bottom Arm. This aids in getting your body rotation to fully finish the twisting motion described above.
5. Do not breathe immediately on your first stroke off your turns.
6. FAST into the wall = FAST flip (vice versa, Slow into the wall = slow flip)

Now, if you have a longer swim set like 15, 20 or 25 X 100 Free on a moderate/aerobic interval, here’s a great way to swim the set while focusing on improving your turns.

In a 100 Free, you’ve got 3 chances to work your flip turns. I’m going to outline what to focus on during each one, either giving a “key tip” to think about or by giving you a drill that helps your flip turn technique.

On the 1st flip turn – I want you to work on flipping straight over onto the wall, as outlined in Key Point #2 above. I want your toes to be pointing straight up towards the ceiling when your feet plant on the wall. Push off on your back – and begin your swim with 3 strokes of Backstroke. Then flip over onto your stomach and resum swimming Freestyle.

On the 2nd flip turn – I want you to focus on bringing speed into the wall and keeping that speed off the wall, as echoed in the Key Point #6 above. The last 3 or 4 strokes before you flip, I want you to speed up a bit, almost like you are going “moderate-fast” or “85% max effort”. Do a quick flip turn and get off that wall FAST! Imagin the wall is on fire and your feet will be scalded if you leave them planted for too long! Think *speed*, think *quick*, think *GOTTA GET OFF THIS WALL NOW!*

On the 3rd flip turn – I want you to focus on your core/ab muscles and how they are so important in getting a tight flip into your turn, as outlined in Key Point #1 above. So here, you’re going to do a drill called “Tiger Tumbles”. At the flags, take one last, good breath and dive down underwater a few feet. (This should be done at the deep end wall with at least a 6 foot depth, preferably 7 feet or more). With your arms outstretched in front of you, flutter kick to the wall and perform your flip turn while completely submerged underwater. The goal is to do the flip turn without breaking the surface of the water. This is extremely challenging! You will need to utilize your core muscles to flip over as tight as possible. If you feel your feet popping up out of the water, try again, just go deeper and try to curl up tight, knees to chin. Push off like normal, in streamline...and yes, you may breathe right away after this Tiger Tumble! Here’s a video link to a few of my old swimmers performing Tiger Tumbles: <http://www.myspace.com/video/dama/flip-turn-practice/10974856> As you’ll see, the swimmers are not perfectly doing them, as most pop a bit out of the water during the turn. But you’ll get the main idea.

Since you are potentially doing 15, 20 or 25 of these 100's, we're going to mix it up a bit so that you won't get bored.

On the odd numbered 100's in your set, do the 3 focused flip turns/drill as outlined above.

On the even numbered 100's in your set, perform "regular" (unfocused) flip turns, but you're going to swim a drill called **5 strokes and a flip**. Let's do (25 drill/25 swim/25 drill/25 swim) so as to not get too dizzy! This drill is odd, in that you will be doing flips in the middle of the pool, without a wall to "land on"! You will feel very weird at first doing these, but you'll soon get used to it and your flip turns are going to feel great afterwards! Swim 5 strokes of freestyle, flip, swim 5 more strokes, flip again, repeat... Here's a great video by the awesome GoSwim.tv crew that highlights the how-to and the why of doing a "Mid-Pool Flip":
<http://www.goswim.tv/entries/6765/turns---mid-pool-flips.html>

If you are able to complete this set of 15, 20 or 25 X 100's with the flip turn focus and drills, you will have flipped more than 100 times, and guess what? Each of those flips will have been done with a specific focus! Not just a flip to turn you around, not just a flip to lazily glide to the flags, but a flip that focuses on one of the Key Points and feels good, feels fast, feels tight...Now, isn't that a better feeling than swimming a set and ignoring your flip turns?

You can choose to work on your turns to get faster, or you can ignore your turns and stay the same speed despite working hard at practice on tough sets and technique work. Which are you going to choose? If you have any questions about flip turns, feel free to drop me an email at: daniellereneenewton@gmail.com.
Happy Swimming NC Masters Swimmers!
Coach Danielle Newton (DAMA)