

# for the FREESTYLE!

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Photos by Angelika Poletaeva

The secret to propelling through the water with ease and efficiency—and a flawless freestyle stroke—is a strong core. Whether you swim for leisure or for time, it's critical to maintain proper postural alignment where the spine is long, the abdominals are engaged and the ribs are connected. These four moves will help you find and feel the position your ribs should be in, while strengthening your powerhouse and increasing your shoulder mobility. Do them two to three times per week to make a real splash. **PS**



## SINGLE-ARM ARCH WITH SINGLE-LEG EXTENSION

**PURPOSE:** opens the shoulders and chest; strengthens the powerhouse; increases stability in the spine and mobility in the limbs

**SETUP:** Lie on your back, with your legs in tabletop, right hand on your left rib cage and left arm long by your side. Keep the back of your ribs anchored to the mat, your abdominals engaged and your pelvis neutral.

**1.** Inhale, raising your left arm straight up and back as you extend your right leg out long; use your right arm to gently guide and draw your left rib cage down.

**2.** Exhale, returning to the starting position. Do 5–8 reps on both sides.

**TIP:** Reach your arm and leg only as far as you can maintain a long spine and closed ribs.

## BREATHING ON THE MAT

**PURPOSE:** strengthens the hip extensors; works articulation of the spine; opens the chest and shoulders; develops coordination of breath with movement; increases breath capacity

**SETUP:** Lie on your back, with your feet flat, knees bent and legs pressing together. Reach your arms overhead, keeping your ribs connected and spine long.

**1.** Inhale, lifting your hips and peeling your spine off the mat as you reach your arms up and then down by your sides. Keeping your ribs closed, hold your breath for 3–5 counts.

**2.** Exhale, rolling and articulating through your spine to return to the starting position. Do 3–5 reps.

**ADVANCED:** Use a light set of hand weights—1–3 pounds—to build strength and connect the arms to the back body.



## DOUBLE-LEG PULL BENT

**PURPOSE:** enhances coordination of the limbs; strengthens the powerhouse; increases breath capacity

**SETUP:** Lie on your back, lift your head and curl up to the tips of your shoulder blades while gazing at your navel. Draw your knees into your chest, and place your palms on your ankles.

**1.** Inhale, stretching your arms and legs away from you, keeping your back against the mat and your abdominals engaged.

**2.** Exhale, circling your arms around by your sides, then draw your knees back into your chest with your hands. Do 6–10 reps.

**ADVANCED:** Hold your breath for 3–5 counts with your arms and legs extended in step 1, and/or add light hand weights.



## WALL ARM ARCH

**PURPOSE:** opens the shoulders and chest; increases stability in the spine

**SETUP:** Stand against a wall, and walk your feet away from it, until you feel your entire spine resting against it. Position your feet in Pilates stance (heels together, big toes slightly apart), with your arms long by your sides, and abdominals scooping in and up.

**1.** Inhale, raising your arms only to the point where you can keep your spine against the wall and ribs closed.

**2.** Exhale, returning your arms to the starting position, imagining that your collarbones are widening.

**MODIFICATION:** If your shoulders are tight, raise one arm at a time.



## RIB CAGE DOS! AND DON'TS!

Keeping your rib cage connected is a crucial part of swimming, allowing your every stroke to come from the powerhouse, not the low back. Here's what your ribs should look like—and what you should avoid.

**DO!**



The rib cage is closed, the spine is long and the abdominals are engaged—and the low back is safely supported.

**DON'T!**



When a rib cage “pops” or “flares,” the low back tends to arch, leaving the spine in an unsafe position, vulnerable to strains or injuries.

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received her comprehensive Pilates certification through Peak Pilates, completed Kathi Ross-Nash's Advanced Teacher Training program and has been teaching in the Pilates/fitness industry for 14-plus years. She has appeared in Pilates Style several times, and on FOX News Chicago and FOX News Charlotte. Her studio, The Pilates Room – Chicago, is fully equipped with the Gratz equipment line, and located in Chicago's West Loop. Bjornstad Theodore loves teaching to individuals and small groups so each client receives individualized attention. She was inspired to write this story when she started taking private swim lessons 10 months ago. For more information, visit [www.thepilatesroomchicago.com](http://www.thepilatesroomchicago.com).