FREE GUIDE

FOR COMPETITIVE SWIMMERS AND COACHES



ANKLE MOBILITY FOR SWIMMERS

BUILD ANKLE STRENGTH AT FULL POINT FOR A FASTER KICK

17 exercises and two 15-minute routines that build ankle range you can use in the water.

POINTED TOES | TOES TOWARD SHIN | SIDE TO SIDE AND FOOT | CONTROL AND STRENGTH



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YOUR KICK USES ONLY THE RANGE YOUR OWN MUSCLES CAN HOLD

PASSIVE FLEXIBILITY

RANGE SOMETHING ELSE GIVES YOU

How far your foot points when the floor, your body weight or a partner pushes the foot there. Sitting on your heels shows passive range.

ACTIVE MOBILITY

RANGE YOU HOLD WITH YOUR OWN MUSCLES

How far you point your foot with your own muscles, and how long you hold that point under load. Your kick uses this one.

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE WATER

1. In the water, nothing holds your foot in point except your own ankle muscles.
2. On the upbeat of your flutter kick, the water presses on the soles of your feet and pushes them toward your shins.
3. Strong ankles hold the point, so the top of your foot pushes water back on the next downbeat. Weak ankles let the feet drop, and dropped feet push water down and drag.

Every exercise in this guide either adds range or builds strength at the end of that range.

MOVE BEFORE PRACTICE, HOLD LONG STRETCHES AFTER, AND BUILD STRENGTH ON DRYLAND DAYS

BEFORE PRACTICE

5 MIN

Do short, active moves that warm up the ankle. Long holds come after practice.

- 04 Active point and curl
- 05 Knee-to-wall
- 12 Toe yoga
- 17 Heel walks and toe walks

AFTER PRACTICE

10 MIN

Your muscles are warm after the swim, so the long holds go here.

- 01 Kneeling sit-back
- 02 Knee-lift sit-back
- 07 Straight-knee calf stretch
- 09 Deep squat hold

DRYLAND DAYS

15 MIN

Run Day A or Day B from the next page, with the strength work at full effort.

- A Day A routine
- B Day B routine

4 RULES

1. Stretch to a strong pull, never to sharp pain. A pinch at the front of the ankle means back off.
2. Put a folded towel under your knees for exercises 1 and 2 if they bother you.
3. Train both ankles every time, even when one ankle feels looser.
4. Test every 2 weeks: in the knee-to-wall (exercise 5), find the longest distance from the wall where your knee still touches with your heel down. Write that distance down.

ALTERNATE TWO 15-MINUTE ROUTINES, 4 DAYS A WEEK

Every exercise in this guide shows up twice a week. Work top to bottom: stretches first, then strength, then balance and control.

DAY A

ABOUT 15 MIN

Pointed toes, calf range, arch and calf strength.

01	Kneeling sit-back	Hold 30-60 s
07	Straight-knee calf stretch	Hold 30 s
05	Knee-to-wall	10 reps per side
04	Active point and curl	Hold 5 s, 10 reps
12	Toe yoga	10 reps
13	Short foot	Hold 5 s, 10 reps
14	Full-range calf raises on a step	3 x 12
16	Single-leg balance, eyes closed	30 s per side

DAY B

ABOUT 15 MIN

Front of the ankle, deep squat, ankle sides and shins.

02	Knee-lift sit-back	Hold 20-30 s
03	Standing top-of-foot stretch	Hold 30 s per side
08	Down dog pedal	10 per side
06	Banded ankle mobilization	10-15 reps
09	Deep squat hold	Hold 30-60 s
10	Banded inversion	15 reps
11	Banded eversion	15 reps
15	Tibialis raises	3 x 15
17	Heel walks and toe walks	20 steps each

SAMPLE WEEK

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
A	REST	B	REST	A	B	REST

01

POINTED TOES

POINTED TOES LET THE TOP OF YOUR FOOT PUSH WATER BACK

Plantarflexion means pointing your toes away from your shin. On the downbeat of your flutter kick and dolphin kick, the top of your foot is the surface that pushes the water.

The closer the top of your foot lines up with your shin, the more of that push goes back toward your feet, and the less goes down toward the pool floor.

> **Stretch the front of the ankle for range, then hold that range with your own strength.**

WHERE YOU FEEL IT IN THE WATER

- Flutter kick downbeat
- Underwater dolphin kicks off the start and every wall
- Backstroke kick upbeat

IN THIS SECTION

01	Kneeling sit-back	Hold 30-60 s
02	Knee-lift sit-back	Hold 20-30 s
03	Standing top-of-foot stretch	Hold 30 s per side
04	Active point and curl	Hold 5 s, 10 reps



EXERCISE 01

KNEELING SIT-BACK

Opens the front of your ankle, so your toes point further on the flutter kick and dolphin kick downbeat.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Kneel with your knees together and the tops of your feet flat on the floor.
2. Sit back onto your heels.
3. Keep your chest tall and breathe slowly through the hold.

DOSE

HOLD 30-60 S

COACHING CUE

Press the tops of your feet and all ten toes into the floor.

COMMON MISTAKE

Heels splayed out to the sides. Keep each heel in line with the big toe under you.

! Put a folded towel under your knees if they bother you.



EXERCISE 02

KNEE-LIFT SIT-BACK

Takes your pointed range past what the kneeling sit-back reaches.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Start in the kneeling sit-back, sitting on your heels.
2. Put your hands on the floor behind you.
3. Lean back and lift your knees off the floor.

DOSE

HOLD 20-30 S

COACHING CUE

Lift the knees and keep the tops of your feet pressed into the floor.

COMMON MISTAKE

Lifting so high the toes leave the floor. Stop at a strong stretch.

! Put a folded towel under your knees if they bother you.



EXERCISE 03

STANDING TOP-OF-FOOT STRETCH

Opens the front of one ankle at a time, so your weaker foot can catch up to the stronger one.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand tall next to a wall and put one hand on the wall.
2. Set the top of your back foot flat on the floor behind you.
3. Gently press the ankle forward until you feel the stretch across the front of the ankle.

DOSE

HOLD 30 S PER SIDE

COACHING CUE

Stand tall with your hips stacked over your front foot.

COMMON MISTAKE

Rolling onto the little-toe side. Keep the whole top of the foot on the floor.



EXERCISE 04

ACTIVE POINT AND CURL

Builds strength at full point, so your feet stay pointed through the whole kick while the water pushes back.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Sit tall with your legs straight and your hands on the floor behind you.
2. Point your feet as hard as you can.
3. Curl your toes and hold for 5 seconds.
4. Relax both feet, then repeat.

DOSE

HOLD 5 S, 10 REPS

COACHING CUE

Reach the tips of your toes toward the far wall.

COMMON MISTAKE

Curling the toes while the ankle stays half pointed. Point the ankle first, then curl.

! Builds strength at end range, not just stretch.

02

TOES TOWARD SHIN

FLEXED FEET CATCH THE WATER IN YOUR BREASTSTROKE KICK

Dorsiflexion means pulling your toes up toward your shin. In breaststroke, you flex your feet and turn them out before you drive back, so the soles and the inside of your feet catch the water.

Tight calves stop the feet from flexing far enough, and the breaststroke kick slips. The same range lets you sit deep in a tight tuck before every push-off.

> **Stretch both calf muscles and free up the ankle joint, then hold a deep squat with your heels down.**

WHERE YOU FEEL IT IN THE WATER

- Breaststroke kick catch
- Tight tuck on flip turns
- Loaded back foot on the block

IN THIS SECTION

05	Knee-to-wall	10 reps per side
06	Banded ankle mobilization	10-15 reps
07	Straight-knee calf stretch	Hold 30 s
08	Down dog pedal	10 per side
09	Deep squat hold	Hold 30-60 s



EXERCISE 05

KNEE-TO-WALL

Lets your feet flex further for the catch of your breaststroke kick.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Face a wall with one foot about 4 inches from the wall.
2. Keep your heel down the whole time.
3. Drive your knee forward to touch the wall, then back.
4. When the knee touches easily, move the foot back a little.

! Track the longest distance where your knee still touches.

DOSE

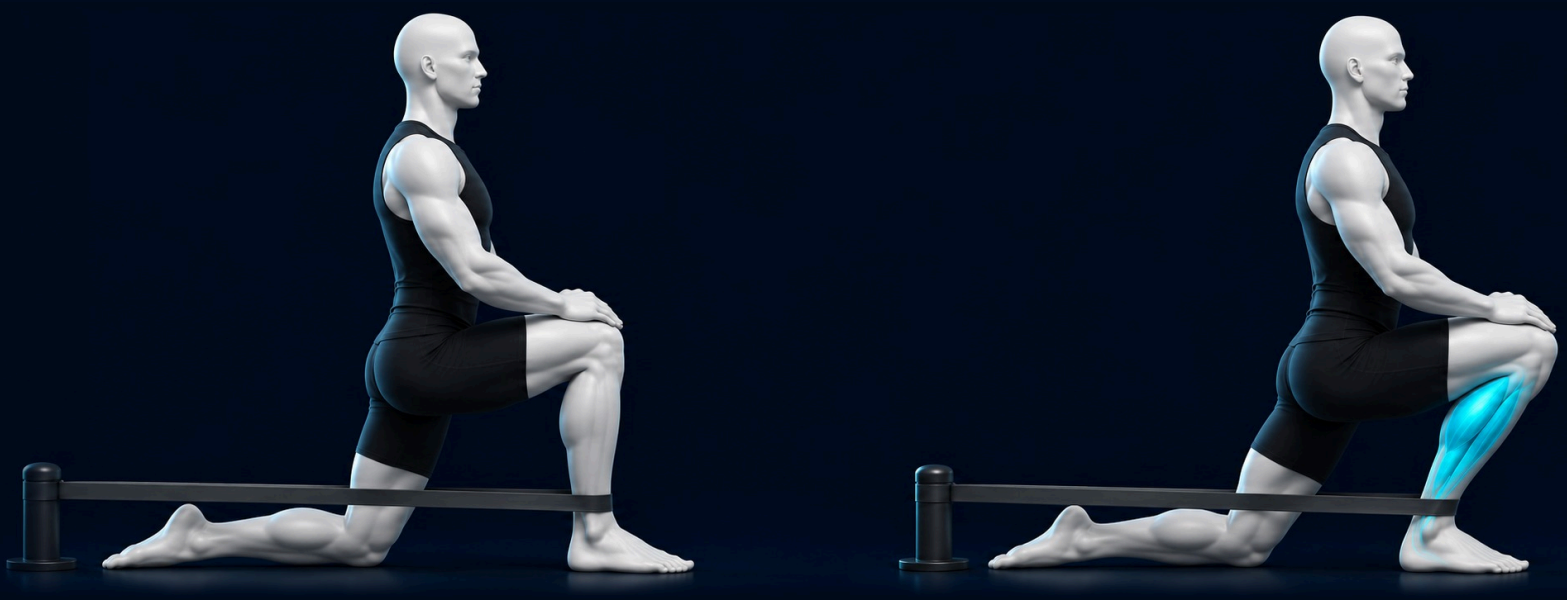
10 REPS PER SIDE

COACHING CUE

Drive the knee straight over your second toe.

COMMON MISTAKE

The heel lifts off the floor. A rep only counts with the heel down.



EXERCISE 06

BANDED ANKLE MOBILIZATION

Frees the ankle joint, so your foot flexes further for the breaststroke kick without pinching.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Kneel on one knee with your front foot flat on the floor.
2. Loop a band low around the front of your ankle, anchored behind you.
3. Rock your front knee forward over your toes, then back.

DOSE

10-15 REPS

COACHING CUE

Let the band pull your ankle back while your knee drives forward.

COMMON MISTAKE

Band too high on the shin. Set the band right at the crease of the ankle.



EXERCISE 07

STRAIGHT-KNEE CALF STRETCH

Stretches the big calf muscle that limits how far your feet flex in the breaststroke kick.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Put both hands on the wall.
2. Step one leg back and keep that knee straight.
3. Press the back heel into the floor and lean toward the wall.
4. Switch legs.

DOSE

HOLD 30 S

COACHING CUE

Point your back foot straight at the wall.

COMMON MISTAKE

Back foot turned out. Turning the foot out takes the stretch off the calf.



EXERCISE 08

DOWN DOG PEDAL

Stretches the calf and Achilles one leg at a time, so you feel which side is tighter.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Start in downward dog: hands and feet on the floor, hips high.
2. Bend one knee and press the other heel toward the floor.
3. Switch legs and keep pedaling.

DOSE

10 PER SIDE

COACHING CUE

Keep your hips high and still while your legs switch.

COMMON MISTAKE

Rushing the pedal. Pause for one second each time a heel reaches down.



EXERCISE 09

DEEP SQUAT HOLD

Opens ankles, knees and hips together for a tighter tuck on every flip turn.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand with your feet about shoulder-width apart.
2. Sit down as low as you can with your heels on the floor.
3. Keep your chest up. Hold onto something if you need to.

DOSE

HOLD 30-60 S

COACHING CUE

Push your knees out over your toes.

COMMON MISTAKE

Heels popping up. Hold a rail or a doorframe so you can sit with the heels down.

03

SIDE TO SIDE AND FOOT

STRONG ANKLE SIDES AND ARCHES KEEP YOUR FEET FIRM ON THE WALL

Inversion turns the sole in. Eversion turns the sole out. Your breaststroke kick turns the feet out to catch water, and every turn plants your feet on the wall at an angle. Strong muscles on both sides of the ankle hold the foot steady under that load.

The small muscles inside the foot control the arch and the toes. When those muscles work, the foot stays firm on the push-off instead of collapsing.

> **Train both sides of the ankle and the arch, so your push-off from the wall and the block stays solid.**

WHERE YOU FEEL IT IN THE WATER

- Breaststroke kick turn-out
- Push-off on every wall
- Toes on the front of the block

IN THIS SECTION

10	Banded inversion	15 reps
11	Banded eversion	15 reps
12	Toe yoga	10 reps
13	Short foot	Hold 5 s, 10 reps



EXERCISE 10

BANDED INVERSION

Strengthens the inside of the ankle, which holds your foot steady when you plant on the wall.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Sit with your legs straight and your hands behind you.
2. Loop a band around the ball of one foot, anchored out to the side.
3. Turn the sole in against the band, then return slowly.

DOSE

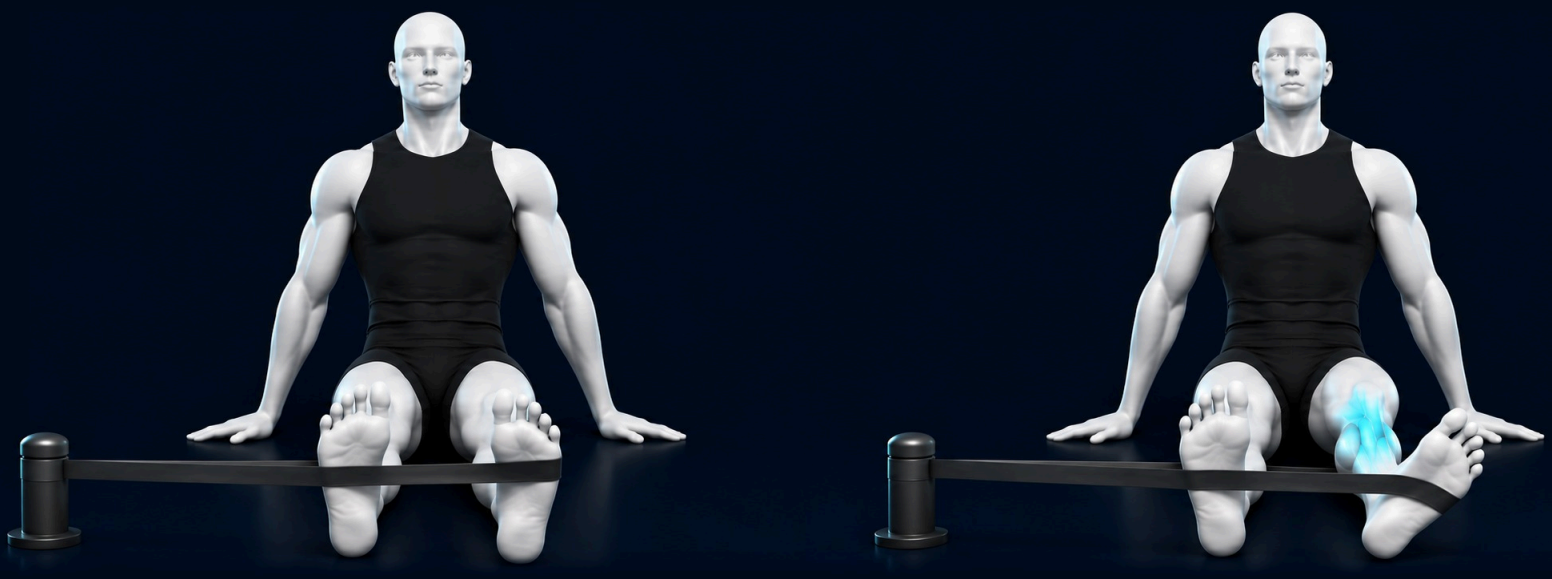
15 REPS

COACHING CUE

Move only the foot. The knee keeps pointing at the ceiling.

COMMON MISTAKE

Rolling the whole leg in. Keep the thigh still so the ankle does the work.



EXERCISE 11

BANDED EVERSION

Strengthens the outside of the ankle, the side that turns your feet out for the breaststroke kick.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Sit with your legs straight and your hands behind you.
2. Loop a band around one foot, anchored on the inside.
3. Turn the sole out against the band, then return slowly.

DOSE

15 REPS

COACHING CUE

Lead the movement with your little toe.

COMMON MISTAKE

Letting the band snap the foot back. Take 2 seconds on the way in.



EXERCISE 12

TOE YOGA

Trains your big toe and small toes to move on their own, so your toes stay firm on the block and the wall.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand with both feet flat on the floor.
2. Lift your big toe while the other four stay down.
3. Switch: press the big toe down and lift the other four.

DOSE

10 REPS

COACHING CUE

Keep the ball of your foot on the floor the whole time.

COMMON MISTAKE

Rolling the foot to help the toes lift. Only the toes move.



EXERCISE 13

SHORT FOOT

Builds the arch muscles that keep your foot firm on the push-off from the block and the wall.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand with your foot flat on the floor.
2. Pull the ball of your foot toward your heel to lift the arch.
3. Keep your toes long and relaxed, then hold.

DOSE

HOLD 5 S, 10 REPS

COACHING CUE

Make the foot shorter. The toes stay long.

COMMON MISTAKE

Curling the toes. Curled toes hide a lazy arch, so keep the toes flat.

04

CONTROL AND STRENGTH

STRENGTH AND CONTROL TURN NEW ANKLE RANGE INTO A FASTER KICK

Range you can't hold with your own muscles never shows up in the water. Calf raises build strength from a deep stretch all the way to full point.

Tibialis raises strengthen the front of the shin, the muscle that flexes your feet for breaststroke. Balance and walking drills train the ankle to react fast.

> **These four exercises are the active mobility work. Without them, sections 1 to 3 add range your kick can't hold.**

WHERE YOU FEEL IT IN THE WATER

- Holding point on the last 25 of a race
- Breaststroke kick recovery
- Steady feet on the block

IN THIS SECTION

14	Full-range calf raises on a step	3 x 12
15	Tibialis raises	3 x 15
16	Single-leg balance, eyes closed	30 s per side
17	Heel walks and toe walks	20 steps each



EXERCISE 14

FULL-RANGE CALF RAISES ON A STEP

Builds calf strength from a deep stretch to full point, the range your feet use in every kick.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand on the edge of a step on the balls of your feet. Hold a rail.
2. Lower your heels into a deep stretch.
3. Rise as high as you can and pause at the top.

DOSE

3 X 12

COACHING CUE

Push through your big toe at the top.

COMMON MISTAKE

Half reps. Go all the way down and all the way up. The top of the rep is the point your kick uses.





EXERCISE 15

TIBIALIS RAISES

Strengthens the front of your shin, the muscle that flexes your feet for the breaststroke kick.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Lean your back against a wall.
2. Walk your heels out in front of you, about a foot from the wall.
3. Lift your toes as high as you can, then lower slowly.

DOSE

3 X 15

COACHING CUE

Pull your toes toward your shins.

COMMON MISTAKE

Dropping the toes fast. Take 2 seconds to lower every rep.



EXERCISE 16

SINGLE-LEG BALANCE, EYES CLOSED

Trains your ankle to make fast small fixes, the same control your feet need on the block before the start.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Stand on one foot with a soft knee.
2. Close your eyes and hold.
3. Switch feet.

DOSE

30 S PER SIDE

COACHING CUE

Spread your weight across the whole foot.

COMMON MISTAKE

Locking the standing knee. Keep a small bend so the ankle does the balancing.

! Stand near a wall the first few times.



EXERCISE 17

HEEL WALKS AND TOE WALKS

Builds endurance in the front of your shin and your calf at both ends of your ankle range.

HOW TO DO IT

1. Walk on your heels with your toes lifted high.
2. Then walk on your toes with your heels lifted high.

DOSE

20 STEPS EACH

COACHING CUE

Stand tall. Keep the heels as high as you can on the toe walk.

COMMON MISTAKE

Bending forward at the hips. Stay tall from head to heels.

TAKE YOUR KICK STRENGTH INTO THE GYM WITH SWIMMER'S STRENGTH

This guide works on your ankles. Swimmer's Strength is my 12-week gym program for swimmers, and I built every session around your start, your push-off on the wall and your kick.

COACH MARIA / 12-WEEK PROGRAM

SWIMMER'S STRENGTH

FOUNDATION | BUILD | PERFORMANCE

WHAT YOU GET

- 12 weeks in 3 phases: base strength, max strength, power
- 3 tracks, from your first time in the gym to 2+ years of lifting
- 56 exercises, each tied to your start, your turns or your kick
- Sessions of about 45 minutes that fit around swim practice
- Strength logs and a week 12 test, so you see the progress

GET SWIMMER'S STRENGTH

fastswim.co/swimmers-strength



Not sure which track fits you? DM me on Instagram **@mashaswims** and I'll help you pick.