

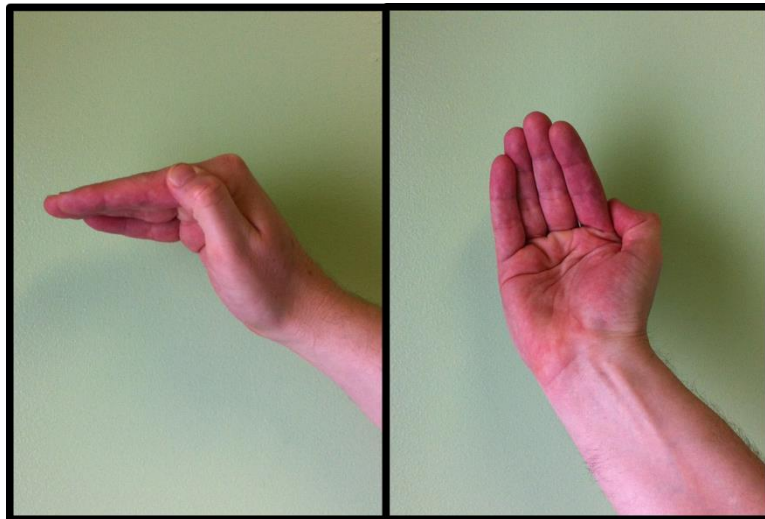
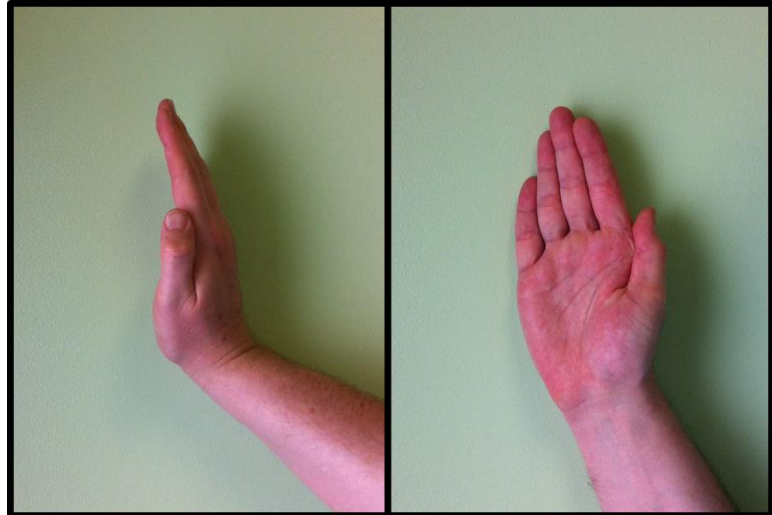
Proper Hand Positioning

By Greg and Erika Burgess

You may not give it much thought. Maybe you were taught incorrectly as a child. Maybe you are focused on so many other things it slips your mind. It seems so simple, maybe even inconsequential, but proper hand positioning can have big impact on your swimming efficiency.

Many people incorrectly believe that swimming with their hands cupped like ice cream scoops, with fingers squeezed together, is the most effective means of hand positioning.

Right: The "Knife" Hand, incorrect position



Left: The "Ice Cream Scoop" Hand, incorrect position

Yet if you talk with someone educated in the field of fluid dynamics, they will confirm what most elite swimmers know: separating your fingers to create *slight* spacing between them will increase the drag coefficient for your hand in water, thus increasing the force of water against your hand. This is the force that, in turn, thrusts your body forward.

When swimming any stroke, you should keep your hands relaxed and engaged, but not tense. Swim with your fingers separated with your thumbs turned slightly inward. Relaxing your hands will naturally create space between your digits, while also helping you to conserve energy and be more efficient. Any time you exert your muscles (e.g., squeezing your fingers together) you are expending energy. So by

keeping your fingers tightly pressed together, you are wasting energy and being less effective in your pull at the same time.



Left is an image of correct hand positioning:

The next time you are in the pool, watch your hands—you should be able to see them when you go through the catch phase of your stroke in freestyle. A coach or lane mate could help you monitor and correct your hand positioning as well.

This may seem like an easy fix, but if you have been swimming with ice cream scoops for years, it may take some time and mental concentration to unlearn this habit. To gauge how this small change impacts your stroke, swim a 50 and count your strokes using your original hand position and then swim another 50 and count your strokes with the new hand position. I bet your stroke count will go down, which means you have a more efficient stroke count. We should all strive to swim more efficiently.