

12-WEEK GYM PROGRAMME

MASTERS BACKSTROKE DRYLAND STRENGTH



A 12-week gym programme for masters swimmers — pulling power, long-axis rotation and shoulder health for a faster, flatter, more efficient backstroke.

WHY BACKSTROKE TRAINS DIFFERENTLY

Backstroke is a rotating, supine stroke. Speed comes from a strong alternating pull — driven by the lats and transferred through long-axis body roll — over a steady, hip-driven flutter kick. The challenge is holding a high, flat body line on your back while the shoulders work through a demanding overhead recovery and catch. So the gym priorities are pulling power, a rotating core, hip and body-line strength, and above all healthy, mobile shoulders.

- **LAT-DRIVEN PULL**

The catch and pull-through — the engine of the stroke.

- **LONG-AXIS ROTATION**

Body roll that transfers power between the arms.

- **SHOULDER STABILITY & MOBILITY**

Healthy shoulders for a demanding overhead recovery and catch.

- **HIP & BODY LINE**

Glutes, hip flexors and core for high hips and a strong flutter kick.

- **SCAPULAR CONTROL & POSTURE**

A strong, stable mid-back behind every pull.

HOW TO RUN THE PLAN

Two gym sessions per week, sitting alongside your pool training.

Work through the three phases in order — four weeks each, twelve in total.

Each phase earns the next: build a pulling base and healthy shoulders before you load up, then add speed last.

FOUNDATION

1

Build a pulling base, healthy shoulders and the body line before loading.

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	FOCUS
Lat pulldown Grooves the catch-and-pull path that drives backstroke.	3 × 12	VERTICAL PULL
Inverted row Horizontal pull and mid-back strength for posture and the catch.	3 × 10	PULL
Face pull / band pull-apart Posterior cuff and scap health — protects an overhead-loaded shoulder.	3 × 15	SHOULDER
Romanian deadlift Glutes and hamstrings for high, flat hips.	3 × 8	POSTERIOR CHAIN
Dead bug Anti-extension control — keeps the hips up and the line long.	3 × 8 / side	CORE
Pallof press A stable trunk to roll around without losing the line.	3 × 10 / side	ANTI-ROTATION
Hanging knee raise Hip-flexor strength for a strong, continuous flutter kick.	3 × 12	HIP FLEXORS

PHASE GOAL

Earn the right to load. A pulling base and healthy shoulders before any speed.

STRENGTH & POWER

Heavier pulls and rotational strength under load.

2

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	FOCUS
Pull-up or weighted pulldown Top-end pulling strength — weight if strong, band if not.	4 × 6	MAX PULL
Single-arm dumbbell row Matches the single-arm catch; exposes side-to-side gaps.	3 × 8	UNILATERAL PULL
Straight-arm pulldown Isolates the lat through the catch-to-pull path.	3 × 10	LAT
Landmine or cable rotation Trains body roll under load — power around the long axis.	3 × 8 / side	ROTATIONAL POWER
Trap-bar deadlift Whole-body strength base behind a high, stable body line.	4 × 5	POSTERIOR CHAIN
Half-kneeling overhead press Overhead strength and stability for the recovery and catch.	3 × 8	SHOULDER
Hollow hold The braced, connected line that keeps the hips up.	3 × 20-30s	STATIC CORE

PHASE GOAL

Bridge strength to speed. Pull heavy, then add the rotation that transfers.

POWER & PLYOMETRICS

Express the strength explosively — low volume, high quality.

3

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	FOCUS
Med ball overhead slam Fast, lat-driven action for a powerful catch.	4 × 5	EXPLOSIVE PULL
Med ball rotational throw Explosive body roll — drive power across the trunk.	4 × 4 / side	ROTATIONAL POWER
Explosive band pulldown Move the pull pattern at speed — intent over load.	3 × 6	FAST PULL
Kettlebell swing Explosive hip extension for hip height and kick power.	3 × 6	HIP DRIVE
Plyo press-up Explosive pressing for shoulder power and balance.	3 × 5	UPPER PLYO
Hollow rock Dynamic core control to hold the line under fatigue.	3 × 15	CORE
Weighted streamline hold Strength in the long streamline off every start and turn.	3 × 20s	STATIC HOLD

PHASE GOAL

Be fast, not tired. Express the power explosively — stop the moment speed drops.

THE MASTERS RULES

Adult swimmers respond to the same training as anyone — they just need to respect recovery and the shoulder a little more. These five rules keep the plan working for the long haul.

- 01** **WARM UP, EVERY TIME**
 Five to eight minutes of shoulder mobility, band activation and light pulls before you load. Cold shoulders under heavy pulls are how masters get hurt.
- 02** **SEPARATE HARD FROM HARD**
 Keep heavy and explosive sessions at least a day from your biggest backstroke pull sets. Two maximal stimuli on a tired shoulder is where overuse starts.
- 03** **MIND THE SHOULDER**
 Backstroke's recovery and catch load the shoulder in vulnerable positions. If it niggles, drop overhead pressing and heavy pull-ups, keep the cuff and scap work, and never train through pain.
- 04** **PROGRESS ONE THING AT A TIME**
 Add load before speed or volume. Chasing both at once is the fastest route to a niggle that costs you weeks in the water.
- 05** **RECOVERY IS TRAINING**
 Sleep, protein and a day between sessions are doing real work. The adaptation happens between sessions, not during them.

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