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# Texas Nature Kayaking Guide

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## Rescues – Paddle Swimming

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Anyone who goes out in a kayak may end up turning over. You have learned to hold on to your kayak, and you have trained to get back into your kayak in deep water. You know you should not go out alone, but what happens if you turn over and the wind blows your kayak out of reach? Your friends will bring your kayak back, but what happens if your friends are looking the other way and do not hear your whistle?



**Figure 2.** She kicks to keep her feet near the surface, to reduce the drag.

it. We call it the paddle swim. Paddle swim to shore or to where your kayak has blown.

Watch the angle of your paddle blade in the water. If it is vertical, you will move forward. If it is tipped just a degree or two, it will either tend to keep your upper body higher in the water or lower in the water as you move forward. Adjusting the paddle angle comes in handy when there are swells or waves. Just a little practice and you will have the technique down. If you feather the blades of your paddle, it will take a little more practice.



**Figure 1.** She is using her arm muscles, rather than rotation at the waist as we do in a kayak.

There is a simple rescue technique that most kayakers have never heard of doing, but if they thought about it, without any training they could perform the technique. With a little practice, they could become proficient in using the technique. Hold the paddle in a comfortable position with your hands about elbow distance apart. Hold your paddle in front of you and paddle. Kick your feet to keep your feet close to the surface of the water. Go out and try



**Figure 3.** With the paddle swim, she can reach the far shore if necessary.

I've never tried the paddle swim without a PFD, because I never kayak without a PFD. It probably would not work if you were not wearing your PFD, since you would be lower in the water.



**Figure 4. A breast stroke is hard to photograph with a camera with a 2-second delay between depressing the shutter and the picture being taken.**

I had not thought of using the breast stroke or the back stroke. During a photo session, a friend was in the water demonstrating the crawl stroke when she moved to the breast stroke and then the back stroke as if she had been practicing them.

Next time you are in the water, try this technique.

You do not move as fast as you can move when you are in your kayak, but you can swim much faster than if you were trying to use your arms to propel yourself. I wonder, after watching my friend, should we leave our kayaks at home and just use our PFDs for kayaks? Sure would be easier to transport.

After you have paddled a hundred feet or so, switch from the crawl stroke to the breast stroke. You keep the paddle horizontal, lift the paddle above the water, move the paddle forward (away from you), lower it into the water, and then pull it towards you.

If you get tired of the crawl stroke and the breast stroke, you can recline on your back and do a back stroke. As with the breast stroke, the paddle is held horizontal. Place the paddle in the water, push the paddle towards your feet, lift the paddle out of the water, bring it back to the entry position, lower it into the water, and then push it away from you.



**Figure 5. When her arms get tired, she switches to the back stroke.**