

Using Your Swim Buoy

Safety, Packing & Feeding



Safety

Your swim buoy provides emergency flotation, keeps you visible to Mighty Mac Swim safety boats and to all other boat traffic when you are training. The buoy also allows you to carry nutrition and other supplies.

You will be issued a rescue whistle, which is best attached to the underside of the buoy. String the whistle's lanyard through the two clear plastic belt loops and shorten the lanyard when tying it on, so it doesn't get tangled when swimming.

Write your name clearly with a permanent marker on the buoy.

Please be sure to cinch up your waist belt tightly so you do not lose it when swimming. Anyone found swimming without a buoy must be pulled from the water and disqualified for safety reasons.

Swimmer in Distress Procedure

If needing assistance from a Mighty Mac Swim support boat, please hold on to your swim buoy, blow your whistle and wave an arm in the air.

Packing Strategy

Proper inflation

If you plan to access the contents of our buoy during the swim, it is best not to over-inflate your buoy. When packed on dry land, items should be somewhat loose inside the buoy when inflated, making them easy to remove and re-pack. Remember that the fit will be tighter when the water pressure is pushing against the bottom of the buoy while the weight of the buoy is pushing its' contents into the water. When in the water, the air pressure within your buoy will increase and within reason, should provide more than adequate flotation. You can make removing and re-packing items in your buoy as easy as possible during the swim without sacrificing buoyancy.

What to Pack (suggestions)

- Thin shirt - When you board the ferry for transport to the jumping point offshore from the starting line, you will probably want to have your wetsuit peeled down to your waist (so you don't overheat). Even in August, in the pre-dawn hours you may wish to wear a thin shirt. You can then pack the shirt in your buoy when you finish suiting up. While it is hoped you will successfully finish the swim, if you should get pulled from the water and need to ride out the rest of the race on the ferry, you may wish to wear that shirt again.
- Spare pair of goggles
- Cell phone for emergencies and if using RaceJoy mobile GPS tracking application (encouraged, as it allows not only your family & friends to track you, but also our support boats).
- Nutrition containers - Bottles and any containers you will be opening during the swim should have an attached cap or lid.

Packing to Manage the Rocks?

Due to the rocky bottom at the start & finish of the swim, neoprene socks are highly recommended. High socks tucked under long pant legs of a wetsuit may be the most hydrodynamic. Swimmers generally leave their socks on during the swim and do not pack them. However, if you prefer the added protection of surf shoes, and do not want to swim with them, you will have to take time to pack and unpack them offshore of the starting and finish

lines, or get creative in attaching them to the outside of your buoy. If you are carrying nutrition in your buoy you plan to access, you will want to pack the shoes under the nutrition containers.

Secondary Waterproofing

While your swim buoy is itself a dry bag, make no mistake, contents will get wet if you open the buoy during the swim. Make sure items you do not want to get wet (i.e. cell phone, shirt, etc.) are packed in a waterproof case, thin secondary dry bag or at least in a trustworthy zip lock bag. Even if you don't open your buoy during the swim, the added protection of secondary waterproofing is not a bad idea.

Feeding Strategy

Need for Speed: During the Mighty Mac Swim, time is often of the essence when stopping to feed in the currents of the Straits of Mackinac. Swimmers swept outside the 100-yard wide swim lane are subject to extraction and disqualification.

Feeding Strategy #1 - Not opening buoy to feed

Avoiding the time & effort of opening your buoy to feed may be most advantageous, provided matters of accumulating water weight and added drag are addressed or are not an issue to you.

Internal Drink Bladder: Carrying a drink bladder (i.e. from a Camelback) in your buoy and running the hose to the outside provides an alternative to opening your buoy to drink. When rolling up the bag, care should be taken to roll up a length of the hose parallel with the bag flaps, avoiding kinks, before running the hose out one side at the top. Rolling the bag up tightly enough to get a waterproof seal without kinking the hose is the goal, but can be a challenge. It may take a few tries to get it right. Accumulating water weight may occur to various degrees without a waterproof seal. Secondary waterproofing is advised if you want to be assured items stay dry.

External Nutrition Containers: Affixing nutrition packages or containers to the outside of your buoy provides an alternative to opening your buoy to feed. This can often be accomplished simply by getting creative with duct tape, carabiners and/or short tethers (please use fluorescent duct tape).

Heavy containers, such as liquid in bottles, can be attached to the bottom of the buoy (if attached to the top, it will almost certainly roll the buoy over). A bottle attached to each side of the buoy is another possibility. Bottles in the water will obviously create some additional drag.

Light packages or containers of gels or solid nutrition may be adhered to the top of the buoy, usually without issue.

Feeding Strategy #2 - Opening buoy to feed

If you plan to carry and access nutrition containers in your buoy, pack them so they are at the top in as few containers as possible.

Procedure for Feeding Strategy #2

If you are going to access nutrition containers inside your buoy to feed, there is a suggested procedure for making feeding as easy as possible.

When it's time to feed, tread water (not that much effort in a wetsuit) and open your buoy. Pull out one nutrition container at a time, being careful that other items remain in the buoy (hence the importance of having as few containers as possible). Without closing your buoy, hug the buoy to secure its' remaining contents and so you no longer have to tread water. Keeping your hands free, use both hands to hold the container and open the attached cap. When finished feeding, get off the buoy and tread water again. Re-pack the nutrition container (usually under the surface of the water), then pinching the bag closed except for small opening, pour the water out. Roll up the bag tightly in the direction of the valve, which should be out of the water at the top of the buoy. If you roll it up the other way (into the water), you are likely to get more water in the buoy during the process. When completely rolled up, fold down to buckle, so the buckle is on the underside of the buoy.

Helpful Hints & Ideas

Practicing, Experimenting & Adjusting Your Buoy

You will want to spend ample time practicing with your buoy in the open water before game day, and to figure out how to set up your buoy in the manner which is most efficient for you. In addition to experimenting with and practicing feeding procedures, you will want to pay attention to adjusting the buoy's tether and waist belt. The length of the tether should be short enough to keep the buoy from interfering with your kick, while long enough to allow enough slack to efficiently access the buoy when you are vertical in the water. If your waist belt does not adjust to a small enough size (this has been an issue for some), you may have to pull out the slack, double it up and sew it.

Protecting Your Buoy

A strong jerking impact with the water may detach and/or destroy your buoy. Hold on to your buoy when jumping into the water (i.e. from the Mighty Mac Swim ferry). If you have external nutrition packages or containers affixed to your buoy, and are unsure of whether their attachment is secure enough to survive the jump from the ferry, use both hands to hold on to the buoy and its' attachments. Without a hand to hold on to your goggles, slip the goggles down around your neck for the jump.

During training, when entering the water from shore in heavy surf, it is advised to hold on to your buoy prior to the moment of impact with a large breaking wave. Release the buoy and begin swimming out again immediately after impact to minimize the distance you are swept backward with the wave. Making your way past the breakers on the way out may take some time, but your buoy will be protected, and you are likely to get a challenging (and safe) workout. Coming in on your return to shore will be much easier, as you can simply hold on to your buoy and ride the surf.

Night Swimming

Putting a flashlight in your buoy makes it glow like a fluorescent lantern at night.

Use Your Buoy to Record Your Adventure

Mounting a waterproof camera (i.e. GoPro) to your buoy creates dramatic footage and forever preserves your memories.

Swim buoys and **neoprene socks** described in this document (along with the world's finest wetsuits) may be purchased at discounted prices from **Aquaman**, a valued sponsor of the Mighty Mac Swim. Please click on the link below.

<https://www.mightymacswim.com/discounts-1>