

GIVE IT A TRI COACHING

For The Beginner Triathlete

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the distances for triathlons?

While differences can vary a bit from race-to-race, (mostly in sprints) these are the general breakdowns for Super Sprint, Sprint, Olympic, Half Ironman and Ironman distances.

Name	Swim	Bicycle	Run	Notes
Super Sprint	400 m (0.25 miles)	10 km (6.2 miles)	2.5 km (1.5 miles)	Distances vary, but this is a standard Super Sprint course.
Sprint	750 m (0.5 miles)	20 km (12.4 miles)	5 km (3.1 miles)	A 500 m swim is also common. The Sprint Distance is the fastest growing triathlon race distance in the United States
Olympic	1.5 km	40 km	10 km	Also known as "international distance", "standard course", or "short course".
Half-Ironman	1.9 km (1.2 miles)	90 km (56 miles)	21.09 km (13.1 miles)	Also called an "Ironman 70.3", or "medium distance".
Ironman	3.8 km (2.4 miles)	180 km (112 miles)	42.195 km (26.2 miles) marathon	Also known as "iron distance" or "long distance".

What do I need to complete my first triathlon?

All you really need is the desire and commitment. Almost anyone can complete a triathlon. Even if you have to doggie paddle your way through the swim, push the bike up the hills, and walk/jog the final leg! Just keep your focus, don't give up, and remember you are winner through the very act of crossing the finish line.

Do I have to be a gifted athlete in great shape to join?

No. You can do a tri regardless of your incoming fitness level. You must however want to improve your fitness and be ready to put in the time and effort needed. In some cases, a doctor's o.k. is needed, though it might not be a bad idea to have a check up, if you haven't been active in a while.



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Why would I want to do a triathlon?

It's fun, you want to improve your health, it's challenging, you want to prove something to yourself you are raising money for a charity, a friend invited you - the reasons are endless. Whatever your reason, you will discover a new you along the way. You'll find you sleep better, eat better, are less moody, lose weight, gain lean muscle mass, have more energy and boost your immune system. In short a healthier and happier person all around. Really!

What is the downside to triathlon?

The biggest issue for most people is not the athletic endeavor, but the time commitment. On the up side, in order to have the necessary time, you will need to be better organized and spend less time on nonproductive behaviors such as watching TV, internet surfing, random eating.

How does a triathlon work?

Individuals complete three athletic disciplines: swimming, biking and running. There is usually a central transition area where you rack your bike and keep your gear. Set up in a small area under your bike - running shoes and/or cycling shoes at the ready, a small towel laid out, extra water, gel or bars, bike helmet on your seat or handlebars, tri-belt, a tee shirt or pair of shorts if you wish to wear them. Space is limited so be courteous of other athletes and don't infringe on another person's space.

After exiting the water at the "Swim Finish," you run to the transition area and locate your bike. It is a good idea to tie a bright colored bandana to the row where your bike is and another one right by your bike. It can get pretty hectic as everyone is scrambling about and many bikes look similar. If adding clothing, remember shorts before shoes, shirt before helmet. Walk or run your bike to the "Bike Start" - riding is generally not permitted inside the transition area - and head out on the bike course.

After finishing the bike course, you return to the transition area, rack your bike in the same place it was before, quickly change into your running gear, and go.

How much time will I need to spend training each week?

Generally 4-6 hours, 5-6 days per week is plenty. This allows plenty of time to build skills and endurance in each discipline as well as time for strength training and flexibility. The goal is to gradually acclimate your body to the actual demands of the race.

How long will it take me to do the race?

A lot of factors can affect race day performance including weather, road and water conditions, and other people. The trick is to let go of what you can't control and focus on your own sphere of influence - such as your mental attitude, equipment preparation, nutrition and hydration, and transition set up.

Most beginners will take 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours to complete the course. The swim will average 15-25 minutes, the bike 45 minutes - 1 1/4 hour, and the run 30-45 minutes.

I am uncertain about the swim (the bike), (the run).

Most first-timers are usually scared about one particular leg of the event. Even experienced triathletes have a least favorite event.

Swim: Often the swim can be the most frightening as many people don't have a lot of experience with open water swimming. The race organizers know this, which is why the swim is so well monitored. All triathlons have lifeguards and helpers in kayaks, on surf boards, or in boats stationed all along the route. If you fatigue, get kicked, or have a cramp, just stay calm and signal for help. You can hold on to the kayak, boat or board for as long as you need to without being disqualified. The swim is the shortest portion of the race, about 17% of total race time is in the water.

The biggest mistake first timers make is getting caught up in the start adrenalin and going out to fast. Hang back a bit and let the hot shots go first. The seconds you lose letting the faster swimmers go first will be more than compensated by not getting kicked or hit as swimmers jockey for position.

Bike: The most important consideration in this section is to be aware of your surroundings and keep yourself under control. Follow the rules of the event, usually staying as far right as possible unless you are passing a slower rider. It is also a good idea to call out "Passing Left", when you are doing so. This alerts the rider of your presence. After passing and clear, return to the right. NEVER ride on the left side of the lane if you are not passing; you are a danger to yourself and other faster riders behind you. Be attentive of other riders; they may not be as courteous as you are but it is everyone's responsibility to keep a race safe. This section is about 50% of the total race.

Run: Everyone knows how to run – just like walking except faster. The tricky part here is the transition from the bike. Your legs may cramp and feel very heavy. You may have difficulty establishing a smooth gait. Start out slowly - walk if you need to and gradually pick up your pace as your body acclimates to the change. The run is the final 33%.

Finish Line: If you start to waver during any part of the race, just think about how wonderful it will feel to cross the finish line. The sense of accomplishment in completing your first triathlon - no matter how long it takes you - will change your life. Raise your hands, look up and SMILE for the photographer – you are now an official "Triathlete" and you'll wear that distinction with pride.

What strokes are permissible?

Any stroke is allowed as long as you are not using artificial means to propel yourself through the water – i.e. fins. The most common and efficient stroke is freestyle. Breaststroke and side stroke are good for resting and regaining your breath. Establishing a smooth stroke and breathing pattern is the key to making it through the swim.

Should I wear a wetsuit?

The benefit of a wet suit is that it keeps you warmer, which is helpful if the water is below 70, and you will be more buoyant, which makes the swim easier. Most races do allow wet suits and often you can rent one in a local bike/run/tri shop. But do your research first. Wet suits come in lots of styles and types – long sleeve, short sleeve, sleeveless, zipper back (very hard to undo) or front. Be certain to try it out before race day.

How often should I "sight"?

Try to learn the course before the race so you know where you are going. One of the hardest things for first timers is staying on course and you may end up swimming a longer race than required. Sight each buoy in sequence and focus on it when you lift your head every 6-8 strokes. Also be aware of the location of the next buoy so you can steer

as straight a course as possible. Choose goggles with clear lenses and rub on a drop of de-fogger to keep your lens clear during the race.

How often should I breathe during a race swim?

If this is your first race just breathe when you need air, even if that means every 2 strokes. As you get a race or two under your belt, you will learn bilateral breathing - alternating sides and breathing every 3rd or 5th stroke. This also helps with navigation and swimming in a straight line.

What type of bike should I use?

Most triathletes start out with an older used speed road bike or a mountain bike. Unless it is an off-road race, get a pair of skinnier, road tires. The amount of friction caused by knobby tires makes the ride slower and more difficult. Whatever style bike you use, have it checked out, tuned up, and fitted.

If you already own a road bike or plan on doing other types of riding, consider getting clamp on aero bars. This will help you ride in a more aerodynamic position, working the quads less and saving them for the run. At the top of the line are tri bikes. These have a huge advantage in body positioning and are more aerodynamic than road bikes. They also corner and handle differently than road bikes, so they take some practice.

What if I have a flat during the race?

Know how to change a flat and carry with you a spare inner tube and tools. Lightweight pouches attach under the seat for this purpose. Otherwise the race is over.

What should I wear?

If you are not using a one-piece tri suit, keep it simple. For either men or women a bathing suit is a good place to start. Men can then pull on tri-shorts or bike shorts and a race singlet or bike jersey. Women can wear a sports bra, tankini top or bathing suit and then add bike, running or tri shorts and a tee shirt on top. Comfort is very important, so try on and practice in whatever apparel you choose.

Note: Bike shorts come with extra padding in the crotch, so make certain you can move comfortably in them. Most apparel (other than a cotton blend) dries during the bike ride and generally there is no private changing area.

How do I avoid cramps during the run?

Two good suggestions to avoid cramping when you start the run are to (1) stay hydrated on the bike and (2) during the last couple of miles on the bike, stretch your calves by standing on the pedals and dropping your heel down.

What should I eat race morning?

Hopefully during your training you will have experimented with this and have a good sense of what your body needs to stay fueled. Generally complex carbohydrates such as oatmeal and whole grain breads or pancakes with fruit work well. Consider how long it will take you to complete the race, then add in the amount of time needed for travel, set up, and waiting for the start. Time your meal to conclude about 2 hours before your event.

What should I eat during the race?

If you are racing less than 1.5 hours, you will probably only need water. Anything more, you will benefit from additional calories. Generally 400-600 calories on the bike – which is the easiest time to eat - will take you to the finish. During training experiment with different types of bars, gels, and sports drinks so you know what works for you. **Never** try something new on race day – food, drink, equipment, or shoes.

What if I have to go to the bathroom?

Surprisingly, this is often not a problem. During intense exercise your body concentrates its resources and functions to where they are needed most – the working muscles. Both the digestive and urinary systems go into semi-hibernation, which is why fluids and gels are easier to digest than bars.

Will a triathlon be cancelled due to bad weather?

Generally not, unless there are clear safety issues involved, for example lightning. A race might get delayed until the weather clears or rerouted if road conditions are unsafe. But triathletes are a pretty hardy bunch and can manage a little inclement weather. Common sense adjustments, such as slowing down on the bike or taking the curves and down hills more slowly are advised.

What is body marking?

Body marking is one way of identifying registered athletes. Typically your number is marked on your arm and thigh. It looks pretty cool and if you leave it on for a few days after the race, you will notice people noticing you with new respect.

Do I need a USAT membership to compete in triathlons?

No, but if you are participating in a USAT sanctioned race, you will need to pay an additional \$10 per race beyond the race entry fee. If you plan on doing more than two races it will save you money to join and there are other benefits - www.usatriathlon.org.

Glossary of Common Terms

Aero Bars -a handlebar extension enabling the rider to have a more aerodynamic position.

Bonk- running out of energy during a race a.k.a. hitting the wall

Buoy - a float used to mark the swim course

Blocking -riding in the passing lane

Brick -a bike/run workout

Drafting- the technique of riding in a pack during the cycling event

Split- the time taken to complete an individual leg of a triathlon

Transition- the period/area between segments of a triathlon where participants change equipment/clothing for the segment.

T1 -the swim to bike transition

T2- the bike to run transition