

## Thinking About Doing A TRI?

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So, you are thinking about doing a triathlon.

What is it that has motivated you?

Is it personal pride, the physical challenge, the thrill of competition?

Perhaps you were flipping the channels one Fall Saturday afternoon and became mesmerized by a bunch of crazy people swimming, biking and running for an entire day while vacationing on some beautiful tropical island. Maybe you were out picking up the morning paper and saw your neighbor heading out for a bike ride. Or did you attend a local triathlon in your area and notice the wide mouthed grins on the faces of the racers as they crossed the finish line?

Whatever the reason, all I have to say is...

EXCELLENT and CONGRATULATIONS!

But be careful...

This triathlon thing is a like a poisonous bug...if you aren't careful, it will bite you. And the poison once in your system is like an addictive elixir. You may never want to quit!

*But where do I begin?*

Let's take a look.

### **The Think Tank**

Now comes the time for you to seriously consider what lies ahead. Now you must sit down with yourself and think about the reality of what it will take for you to be one of those smiling, satisfied human beings crossing the finish line.

To begin with, ask yourself some questions that are tied directly to your home.

Are you married? Do you have kids? What is your daily work schedule? Do you work full time outside the home or do you work full time in the home?

If you are married, you owe it to your mate to discuss this with him/her. Sit down with your partner and discuss the reality of doing a TRI. Of course, the initial conversation can be very encouraging. But understand one thing, neither you nor your partner really knows the type of commitment training for a triathlon takes...physically, emotionally and yes, financially.

**Physically**, you have your own mind, body and sole to think about. Training for triathlons takes commitment, hard work (it will seem so at first) good conditioning, quality time and oh yea, did I mention commitment?

**Emotionally**, you have to deal with fatigue, mental letdowns, outside responsibilities, last minute interruptions to your training program and of course the good times too!

**Financially**, the expenses can become overwhelming. You've got running shoes, cycling shoes, running and cycling apparel, a bicycle, swim suits, goggles, gym fees and pool fees...and yes they all add up.

If you have children, write out a schedule that includes your training and daily responsibilities, with which you and your partner can work and live. And assume you are doing this for the long haul. Anyone can be accommodative for one event. But after that first triathlon, what happens if you love it so much you want to continue? Patience on your partner's part may be short lived. And let's not forget...your partner can always train with you!

And of course, if you are single with children, the scheduling can be even tougher.

But it can be done.

And finally, if you are single, with no children, than you have NO EXCUSES.

I am not here to discourage you, but rather let you know some of the basic facts that go along with triathlon training and racing. But remember, there are folks just like you who have considered these very things, have set out on this very journey and wound up loving it!

### **Getting Down to Business**

First things first...

Before you take another step...you need a goal. Something to shoot for...something to keep you motivated.

To begin, I suggest you choose a particular triathlon preferably close to home. Research the various triathlon magazines or search the Internet for a calendar of races in your area.

Choose a Race: My first recommendation would be to choose a Sprint Distance Triathlon. Determine the time between now and race day and give yourself enough time to adjust to your new training regimen. And set aside enough time to provide for a safe, injury free training period. Furthermore, do not rush your training. I would not schedule a race any sooner than 10 weeks out. And the farther out, the better. Below is a break down of the distances covered in a Sprint Distance Triathlon.

#### **The Sprint Distance Triathlon:**

Swim: ¼ mile = 400 - 500 yards (750m)

Bike: 9 - 15 miles (20km)

Run: 5K or 3.1 miles

There will always be variations in the distances of a Sprint Tri, but most will be pretty close to those listed above

Once you have decided on a race, sit down and map out a training schedule to fit your daily routine.

The first thing to determine when training for a triathlon is - when will you do your training? If you work full time, you will have to create a training schedule compatible with your work schedule. Depending on your athletic background, no longer will your training consist of simply heading out for a run, driving to the pool for a swim or hopping on your bike for an afternoon ride. You must now combine all three sports as part of your training regimen and perhaps even some strength training in the weight room (primarily for strength and endurance).

And you must understand, the majority of your training will consume most of your "one time" *free time*.

Believe me, this will test your commitment. But like I said, most of the folks in this crazy sport are in the same boat, and somehow we all find a way.

I do not know what your goals are regarding triathlon but we can break that down into two basic categories:

- a. To finish the race
- b. To be competitive in the race.

Because it is your first race, I am guessing your main goal is to finish the race and hopefully with a smile on your face! If you decide you love this sport, you will find there are plenty of triathlons out there for you to participate in and if so desired, you can adjust and build your training program around a more competitive performance.

If you decide to become more competitive in your racing, your training will probably become more advanced. Your training program would have to be more organized and well planned. If you decide you want to stick with this sport, then you really must learn to train with patience. Burnout, excess fatigue, injuries and ultimately frustration can develop due to over training, and a discipline, conservative training regimen is absolutely necessary.

## **The Toys!**

Now comes the fun part...coughing up the greenbacks! The first thing to determine is what do you currently possess regarding equipment, training aids, etc and what will you need to purchase? Below is a basic list of those items necessary for training and competition in the sport of triathlon:

## **The Swim**

1. Competitive Swim Suit (usually made of lycra). A swim brief is not a must in the beginning. Any swimsuit will do. Guys, you may feel uncomfortable wearing a men's swimming brief, but if you choose to become more competitive in this sport, a quality suit is crucial to your training. For the ladies, the choices are many, especially regarding racing apparel, so do some research and find out what is best for you.
2. Goggles and bathing cap. You will be racing in a cap, so wearing one may help you get used to it. For ladies and long-haired guys, you will want a cap to keep the

hair out of your eyes while swimming. Get a rubber cap, not lycra.

3. (Optional) A kick board, pull buoy and paddles. If you swim with a masters program or at your local pool facility, these items will probably be available. If they are not and you do decide to stick with this sport, I would consider making the purchase.

### **The Bike:**

1. A Bicycle - at this point, do not concern yourself with purchasing a new bicycle. Any bike with gears will be fine. In fact, many of today's Sprint races have a "fat tire" division for those with mountain bikes, hybrids et.al. It is important, however, to have a bike that fits your body.

2. Bike Shoes. Again, if you decide to stick with this sport, you will need a pair of bike shoes. For your first race, however, you can cycle in your running shoes. Make sure the bike pedals on your bicycle do not require specific cycling shoes. If they do, you will have to make a decision...either purchase different pedals or invest in some bike shoes. If your bike does have cycling specific pedals, I recommend having them switched out for a pair of basic pedals with a toe clip. A new pair of bike shoes can run you between \$100-300. Where as, a set of standard pedals would probably only set you back about \$30 (maybe less!). The bike shop will be able to change them out in a matter of minutes.

3. Cycling apparel. I do recommend purchasing a couple pairs of cycling shorts for your training. Your derriere will be glad you did. Visit your local bike shop or search the Internet. You will find a list of the leading retailers listed in the Tri-Links section of this site.

4. Cycling Computer. A cycling computer will be helpful with your training in determining your speeds and distances. But it is not a necessity. And there are many on the market. If you want one, find the most basic and least expensive.

5. Water bottles and Repair Equipment. Water is vital! You will need water bottles (and bottle cages) for your bicycle. Having spare equipment will do you little good if you do not know how to change a tire. Especially if you are training alone. And always take along some money for a phone call(s) in the event you are left stranded. I have flatted out twice on one ride and all my spares were used up. One phone call, and 15 minutes later, a friend was there to pick me up. For now, I suggest you cycle close to home or with a partner. But for most of us, cycling close to home often means cycling in busier traffic so always cycle with caution.

### **The Run:**

1. A good pair of running shoes. This is very important. If at all possible, try to purchase your first pair from a knowledge source. That is someone who can look at your feet and determine what you may need. Good shoes are important. If there is a running specific store in your area...use it! Even if the shoes are expensive. Once you find a pair you love, then you can order online all day long and really save.

2. Comfortable Apparel. This includes comfortable and weather appropriate clothing.

3. Cap. If the sun is hot, a good cap is a plus to shade your face. Find one made with mesh. This will allow heat from your head to pass through.

### **Accessories:**

1. Heart Rate Monitor. Once you decide you want to stick with this sport, invest in a **Heart Rate Monitor**. It will wind up being your favorite training partner. You will find

a good source for heart rate monitors in the Tri Links section.

2. Wetsuit. Again, if you decide to stick with the sport, you will want to invest in a **wetsuit** as well. Now, for those of you living in areas where the waters remain chilly throughout the Spring and Summer you may want to consider wearing a wetsuit from the get go. But before you buy, see if you can borrow. Do not purchase a Dive suit or Surfing wetsuit. The material is much thicker and suits tend to be looser fitting. A Triathlon wetsuit is light and basically skin tight and allows for terrific mobility.

### **One + One + One = One**

I want to emphasize that even though you may excel in one particular sport (swim, bike or run), it is important to balance all three activities when training. If you are a runner, for example, you will have an advantage over most of the triathletes during your race, as long as you have not wasted yourself on the swim and bike. Because your race performance will be a direct result of your training, a balanced training program is necessary. Once you add two additional sports to your training regimen, your specialty may actually suffer a bit, at least in the beginning. Remember, two of the three events in triathlon – the bike and run - put a great deal of stress on the legs, so again, balance is the key to preventing over training and ultimately injuries.

Now let's discuss each event as they exist in a traditional triathlon.

**The Swim:** Without going into the specifics of "How to Swim", and not knowing your swimming background, I do have a few suggestions. If you are having difficulty with your freestyle in any way and you want to learn some specific drills to improve your stroke, you will find [Four Drills that Will Make You Swim Faster](#) located on this site. Terry Laughlin's [Total Immersion](#) is also a good source for swim drills. If there is a masters swim program in your area with a coach, than I recommend you join. If you do have to swim solo, I have provided several workouts located in the [Swim Section](#) of this site.

Here are some basic facts that may help you as you approach your swim training. Most of today's pools are 25 yards in length and one length = 25 yards. 4 lengths = 100 yards. In a Sprint Distance Triathlon, the typical swim is a quarter mile (¼) or around 400-500 yards, which is equal to 16-20 lengths. Now, some of you may be swimming in a 50 meter pool which will be a bit different regarding lengths and distances.

Refer to conversion chart below:

#### **25 yard pool: 50 meter pool:**

1 length = 25 yards 1 length = 50 meters  
2 lengths = 50 yards 2 lengths = 100 meters  
4 lengths = 100 yards 4 lengths = 200 meters  
16 lengths = 400 yards 8 lengths = 400 meters  
20 lengths = 500 yards 10 lengths = 500 meters

**Cycling.** Beginning a cycling program does not have to be difficult. As mentioned earlier, you will need a bike with gears. And this can be a mountain bike, a hybrid, or preferably a road/triathlon bike. Regardless of the bike you choose easy riding and building mileage is the key. You can start out with 10 miles or so on your rides and

build to 25-30 miles in a relatively quick period of time without injury. In the beginning, do not worry about speed. If you live in a hilly area, try to stay as aerobic as possible on the uphill climbs. Switch to lower gears and try to stay in the saddle. If you happen to have a heart rate monitor, use it and try to keep your heart rate within your aerobic zone. If want to know more about [Heart Rate Monitors and Methods of Heart Training click here](#) .

Also, do not worry about spending big dollars on fancy bike equipment at this point. If you decide to stick with this sport, there will be plenty of time for you to blow your dough on the bike!

Just remember. Make sure your bike is safe and operating, as it should. Take it by your local bike shop and get properly fit. Have them check the brakes, the tires, the gears, etc. to make sure your ride is ready for the roads.

**Running.** If you are not or have not been a "runner" or you are not in the best condition, or perhaps you are returning to running after a long hiatus and you are heavier than normal, you need to approach your running program with care and some smarts. And, there are some excellent books on the market that will help you design a plan to get you high steppin' on the roads and trails:

Tim Noakes...Running Lore  
Jeff Galloway...Marathon Training  
Phil Maffetone...In Fitness and in Health

The reason I refer you to these books, besides the fact that they are interesting and helpful for over all health and fitness, is because these authors endorse walking as a means of building a running program. And they incorporate walking in their programs. Folks, there is nothing wrong with walking before or during a running program. At 6'4" and 200 lbs, my size just doesn't warrant me pounding the pavement as often as many of my lighter, quicker compadre's! So I add some walking. And I find it wonderful. But to each his own and you will learn what is best suited for your body, your size and your physical condition. If you do run on a fairly regular basis, run easy and keep your heart rate a little lower than normal, at least until you begin to acclimate yourself to your new training regimen.

And as mentioned earlier (and I cannot mention it enough) get yourself a pair of good running shoes. Visit a running specific store if at all possible and have someone check out your body position, how you stand, your gate or stride, your feet, etc. and determine what shoe is best for you.

In closing, remember you are incorporating a rather busy and body intensive training regimen - three sports and some weight lifting - with your already busy day. So please, train carefully and use your brain. Our goal at Tri-Newbies Online is keep you involved in this sport for the long haul.

Be patient and Good luck.