

What's it all about?

A beginner's guide!

So then... this Triathlon malarkey, you are clearly fancying having a go as you are already surfing around on our site, trying to find out a bit more information, deciding whether or not to explore the possibility of you having a go yourself. However, I can already sense the doubt, the little voice in your head saying wait, this triathlon thingy is surely for the young, the elite, the super fit, the testosterone fuelled, those sporty types with legs up to their armpits who whizz past you gazelle like whilst you are out in your 3 year old trainers on your little shuffle around the park? If this is what you are thinking..... welcome to our club! Now grab a cuppa and read on! However, I would like to immediately point out that a lot of the content below is purely my own opinion and is based on my own experience as a fifty something year old female!

More and more people are catching the Triathlon bug. It's a fun, sociable sport, offering a tough but achievable challenge and will certainly help with your fitness levels! Triathlon is the fastest growing sport in the UK, with a 10 percent increase in participation year on year. The unique thing about it is that it is a continuous race against time, from start to finish. There's no stopping the clock whilst you get out of your wetsuit, take a sip of your isotonic drink, fix a puncture or lace up your running shoes! Transition (the switch from one sport to another) is as much a part of the race as the swimming, biking and running! Another distinctive feature is the age group structure, which ensures that you are competing against people within the same five-year age bracket as you, rather than you having to pit yourself against athletes half your age!

At the very beginning, around 1974. Triathlon definitely had a macho image and a niche appeal, certainly not a sport for mere mortals to get involved in, but since its Olympic debut in Sydney in 2000 its popularity has taken off massively. A whole range of people can be good at triathlon. Not only does each discipline demand a different configuration of fitness and technique, there are three, arguably, four distinct opportunities to excel. A 6 foot powerhouse may fly on the bike, but suffer on the run, while a little excess body fat won't hold back a swimmer with a good technique, and anyone with dexterity and a quick mind can be a master of transition. While it's not exactly a level playing field, this certainly helps to even things out a bit and makes the sport incredibly exciting.

It can be an intimidating prospect for the uninitiated I agree, swimming, biking and running in quick succession and then throw in the practicalities of carrying out all of the above against the ever ticking clock! So let's have a little look at some basics to quell your anxiety!

The Start Line

Triathlon Race Distances

Race name	Swim distance	Bike distance	Run distance
Supersprint	400m	10km	2.5km
Sprint	750m	20km	5km
Olympic / Standard	1.5km	40km	10km
Middle Distance/Half Ironman	1.9km	90km	21.1km
Long Distance / Ironman	3.8km	180km	42.2km

General Tri Talk - words which you will hear and kind of understand, but not really!

Aerobic Fitness - Fitness of the heart, lungs and vascular system.

Discipline - A term used to describe one of the three sports in Triathlon

Leg - Each section of the race is known as a leg, e.g. It's a tough bike leg.

Transition - The switch from one sport to another, also the term for the area where the transition takes place.

Brick - A training session which links two different disciplines, usually the one when you are transitioning from the bike to the run. The Brownlee brothers make it look easy as they do these every day. The first time I did one, I just looked drunk!!

Drills - Exercises that focus on one specific aspect of technique within one of the particular sports.

So let's say you are going to have a go at doing your first triathlon! You have entered online and the day has finally arrived! Usually your first attempt will be in a pool rather than open water.

GET THERE EARLY THAT PRE RACE BLOCK OF TIME FLIES AND YOU DO NOT WANT TO BE STRESSED!!! You will need to register at the venue (Look for the signs for Registration and join the queue). You may or may not have been sent your swim start time through the post along with a race number or may have had an email containing the relevant on the day information.

When you enter you will have been asked to give a rough idea of how quickly you are going to be able to swim your swim leg. This is a rough guide so you are placed with like swimmers and not put in with the 'fishes'!!! Be truthful or you could see yourself either being swum over or being held up, both are a pain and are avoidable if you give a decent estimate. You will more than likely have done a time trial at a club training session so will have a good idea of what you are capable of. At this point (Registration on arrival at the venue) you are also usually given your timing chip which is on a piece of neoprene and you must wear it on your left ankle with the chip facing towards the outside. During the course of the race you will pass over several timing chips which will register all your different times not only for the three disciplines but also for the time you spend in in the transition areas. Sometimes these bits of neoprene fasten with velcro which can be quite tired, take a large safety pin just in case.. you do NOT want to lose it from around your ankle as they can get charged for!

So now you are registered, go back to your vehicle and get your bike and run stuff sorted. Hopefully you will have gone through and ticked off everything on the check list (supplied at the end of this!) when you packed your car and will have everything with you! If not, don't panic, triathletes tend to be a friendly bunch and someone somewhere will more than likely have what you have forgotten! Don't bank on it though! Get all your bike and run transition 'stuff' and go and rack your bike. Your first Triathlon will also more than likely be a fairly low key event so where you rack your bike could be anything from a secure car park to a field or even a tennis court! Wherever it is, it will be safe and your precious gear will not get stolen. There will be lots of marshals to help you if you are feeling lost, so don't be afraid to ask! Find your specific racking spot. This is often marked with a sticker which is usually your own race number for that event. Hook your bike up by the nose of the saddle so the front wheel is hanging down. Place your bike shoes next to your front wheel and hang your helmet upside down on your handlebars, checking that the straps are not twisted. I put my glasses with the arms already opened up and gloves (if it's longer than a sprint distance) in the upturned helmet and then I put my race belt with my number (attached with safety pins) over the top of that, also hanging on the handlebars. This needs to be already done up so you can just step into it. NB when you are racing and have got out of the pool and you have found and arrived at your bike... **PUT YOUR HELMET ON FIRST AND DO IT UP IMMEDIATELY!!** This is really important! If you take your bike down from the rack without doing this you can be disqualified! Put any nutrition you have decided to take, drink, snack, gel, sandwiches etc onto the bike. Have a good look around transition to take stock of where your bike is and where you leave to go on the bike leg and where you come back in when you have finished the bike. These will be signed, but I find that sometimes when I am 'in the moment' I can't remember which route to take out etc and this can be very costly time wise. Again, I am speaking from experience here! Your transition area should not look like an untidy Hotel room with bags and towels everywhere! Make sure there is no clutter. The less mess there is, the easier it will be to locate what you actually need and get on with your race. Have a final look at where your bike is **EXACTLY** in relation to where you come out of the pool and where you leave with your bike out of the transition area.

So you have racked your bike and all your 'stuff' is ready for when you have come out of the swim. Go back to your vehicle and get organised for your swim leg. Hopefully there will be someone with you who can hold your vehicle key and your tracksuit top/bottoms. If not you will need to sort a locker in the changing room and you will need to wear your locker key on your wrist. It can be a trifle daunting getting in the lineup for the swim. I usually go into a cubicle by myself and do a bit of gentle stretching, but really it is just to get out of the melee of other swimmers who all look like they are going to be amazing and swim like Flipper and you have lost all of your newly discovered self belief just listening to them chatting. Believe me there will be lots of them who are feeling just like you, they are just hiding it well! You will be called in by wave (you will know what yours is from your email or it will be on a board at registration). Just follow the instructions from the marshals and go and do your thing! There will be a continual flow of people getting in and out of the water and you will be told exactly what lane to head for, when to get in and when to actually start. It is really important to count your lengths. I wish I had a pound for every person who has come out of the swim having done two extra lengths as they couldn't remember how many they had done and wanted to make sure so did an additional 50m! Try and get used to counting your lengths at a normal training session when it isn't really vital if you forget. If you have someone with you who can sit somewhere where you can see them on the swim, eg on a balcony, ask them to count your lengths and request that they get up and leave where they are sitting on your penultimate length as an extra thing to help you in case you forget how many lengths you have swum. Once you can't see them sitting there any longer, you know you only have one length left to do!

The Swim Leg

The swim leg is the most frequently dreaded element of a triathlon. Many of us never progressed beyond school swimming lessons and just have recollections of having wet hair dripping down your back and being cold back in the classroom. I completely understand as I myself was a 'don't get my beautifully coiffed bob wet' type of swimmer, terrified to even put my face in, let alone do front crawl! Perish the thought!! At this point you just have to put your faith in our trained and experienced coaches to help you progress firstly in the pool environment and then out into the open water. I came from a near drowning experience to Doncaster Triathlon Club and let me assure you that wherever you are at the moment, yours truly was in a worse place than you are! As long as you can swim a few lengths of some sort of stroke we will happily take you on with open arms and help you progress and gain confidence in the water. Believe me when I tell you that I speak from experience!

Tri Swim Talk

Bilateral - Breathing to both sides during the front crawl stroke

Unilateral - Breathing to one side during the front crawl stroke

Drag - The force that resists our motion through the water

Drafting - Swimming in another swimmer's wake to conserve energy and possibly increase/maintain speed.

Open Water - An outdoor body of water eg, a lake, a river or the sea.

Sighting - Lifting your eyes up just out of the water so you can see where you are going.

Time Trial - a timed effort to monitor your swim, to give you an idea as to where you are in your current training.

Drill - a specific exercise during a swimming session, usually in the pool.

Main Set - The bulk of the current swimming session where you are working on your swim fitness.

Right... your swim is done, dump your hat in the designated bin on the way out of the pool, (the swim hat is usually given to you by the event organiser so they can see what wave you are in as they are various different colours). Head towards the Transition area and find your bike. Yes you may be a bit chilly leaving a warm pool and going outside but this is where you just man up, grit your teeth and get on with it. Trust me you will usually warm up on the bike. If it is just too chilly for you to get straight on the bike in whatever you have worn in the pool (usually an all in one Tri Suit, but not compulsory) make sure you have the extra layer either tied to the bike or placed under your shoes. The transition from the swim to the bike is called T1, and it starts at the time that you

touch dry land. You will go over a timing mat at some point and that time between going over that mat and over another one when you are leaving on your bike is your T1 Transition time. It all gets added into your final overall time.

Top Transition Tips On the Swim to the Bike Leg

Don't forget to put your helmet on immediately and do it up!!!

Take a small towel and lay it down underneath your bike shoes when you are setting up initially before the swim. You can stand on this whilst you are putting your cycle helmet on so you can be removing any detritus you have picked up on the soles of your feet between leaving the pool and arriving at your bike. Place it on the same side as you will rack and unrack your bike to save having to go around to the other side when you are ready to unhook your bike and leave transition.

Put talcum powder in your bike shoes regardless of whether you are going bare foot into your bike shoes or putting socks on. I am a sock wearer and I put talc inside the socks and the shoes as no matter how well you try and dry your feet they will not be easy to get into your socks/shoes.

Leave your bike in a low gear so it will be easier for you to get going once you have gone over the mount line.

The Bike Leg

You have left the pool or lake and gone into T1 (your first transition swim to bike) and you have found your bike. You have got your helmet, shoes, glasses, gloves if required on! You should also have stepped into your race belt and need to swivel your number around to the back. Unhook your bike and head towards the 'Bike Out' sign. Try and run out of T1 holding your bike by the saddle rather than the handlebars. This is not so you look cool! This is so that you will avoid the pedals bashing your legs as you run out of transition. It is actually easier to run with it like this and you can kind of steer the bike with the saddle. This is obviously something you need to practice before race day! **DO NOT GET ON YOUR BIKE UNTIL YOU HAVE CROSSED OVER THE BIKE MOUNT LINE.** This will be marshalled and if you get on before it, you could very well be disqualified. Off you go! Enjoy the scenery and take great care on the roads. In the more low key events the roads will not be closed to traffic and you have to comply with the usual regulations/rules/laws of the road. Be careful not to go over any white lines eg at sharp corners, it's another disqualification possibility! It is also polite to shout thank you to the marshals who have given up their Sunday morning lie in to look after you on the race. The bike leg will be signed usually with luminous coloured arrows fastened to lamp posts, trees, fences, etc so you can't really go wrong... but there is always one! Don't let it be you. Before my first few triathlons I googled the bike leg on the event site and went a few days before and actually drove around it and I even biked my very first one just so I knew the course. It's quite fun if you go with a few of your new tri buddies.

You have now nailed your bike ride and are heading back towards the main transition area. When you are approaching you will need to **GET OFF YOUR BIKE BEFORE THE DISMOUNT LINE...** there's a pattern forming here isn't there? Go back into Transition and rack your bike and get ready for your run. **DO NOT REMOVE OR EVEN UNDO YOUR HELMET UNTIL YOUR BIKE IS SAFELY RACKED.**

Tri Bike Talk

Aero Bars - Handlebar extensions (also known as Tri Bars) that allow you to adopt a more aerodynamic position.

Cadence - The speed at which you make your pedal strokes, or turn the wheels, measured as revolutions per minute (rpm).

Downshift - To change to a lower gear, making it easier to pedal but your speed will decrease, unless you increase your cadence (see above!)

Upshift - To shift to a higher gear, often changing to a smaller cog or larger chainring.

Drafting - Riding in the slipstream of another cyclist by staying close to their rear wheel to conserve energy. **Not allowed in most triathlons and is punishable by DQ.**

Spinning - Turning the legs fast with little resistance.

Turbo Trainer - A piece of equipment that you mount a bike onto which turns it into a stationary bike, allowing you to train indoors when the weather is poor etc.

Cleats - A shaped piece of plastic, a clip essentially which you screw to the bottom of specialist shoes so you can then clip into specific matching pedals so your feet are fastened/clipped into the pedals whilst you ride. There are a few different types of these e.g. for mountain biking or for using at a bike spin class where you are cycling on a static bike.

Top Transition Tips from the bike to the run leg

Don't forget to rack your bike before you undo your bike helmet.

Use elastic laces if you have been clipped into your pedals with special bike shoes - this completely eliminates the need to mess about doing up ordinary laces.

Push the bike by the saddle rather than the handlebars, stops you gashing your legs on the pedals as you run.

Don't forget to take your helmet off. There are some people who do forget this.

The Run Leg

The final element of the race! You have racked your bike, you may have ridden your bike with different shoes on, or you may already be in your trainers. Whatever you have chosen to do, you will finish up wearing your running shoes. You will hopefully also have made a mental note as to where you go to leave T2 (the name given to the transition from the bike to the run). You will set off jogging to the exit and your head will be telling you to get out of transition as fast as possible and your legs will be just screaming "NO" at you! This is the point where if you have not practiced this element of transition i.e. the change from the bike to the run you will seriously wish you had! Again I am speaking from experience here! It really is a horrible feeling! Your legs just won't do what you want them to, and it is like they don't belong to you! It is purely mind over matter you just have to dig in and get on with it and it is definitely easier if you have practiced it beforehand... and I mean more than once! Your legs will however, settle down and you will finally get into your rhythm so now you are out on the run. Observe the signage on the run course carefully so you do not go the wrong way and add precious seconds onto your overall time. Make a note of how many laps there are if that is the case and where there are road crossings etc before you set off. Again, it might be worth having a little recce of the bike and run courses before the day if it isn't too far for you to drive. You complete your run and all that is left is for you to do is to cross that finish line and then bask unashamedly in your own brilliance and be amazed at what you have achieved. Well done you! You've done it!

Tri Run Talk

Cadence - The number of times your foot strikes the ground per minute.

Gait - Your style of running.

Recovery - In the context of running, recovery is jogging really slowly or walking if necessary following a hard effort, in order to get your heart rate back down.

Tempo Pace - A swift, beyond your comfort zone pace.

VO2 Max - The maximum amount of oxygen that can be taken up and used by the working muscles.

Packing List - also includes items for open water swimming not all items are necessary but will help your day run more smoothly

Swim

Cap (not usually necessary for pool based triathlons, as they give you a specifically coloured one depending on your wave).

Goggles

Spare Goggles

Tri Suit or

Wetsuit (open water only)

Lubricant

Earplugs

Spare Earplugs

Contact Lenses

Garmin

Towel

Bike Items

Bar-end Plugs (these are plugs which fit on the end of your handlebars so there is no hole at the end)

Bike!! (Yes people have forgotten their bikes!)

Cycling Shoes (not always necessary, trainers and flat pedals are also fine)

Bike Pump

Nutrition holder for gels etc - fastens onto the bike frame.

Helmet

Socks

Gloves (used on anything other than a super sprint or a sprint distance)

Spare inner tubes and repair kit

Tyre Levers

Multitool

Race Number belt

Safety pins (always useful)

Race number

Electrical Tape (always useful)

Bike tool kit

Elastic Bands (for more experienced triathletes who have their bike shoes clipped onto their bike before they get onto the bike after the swim. The bands hold the shoes up so they do not drag on the ground as the bike is being pushed out of T1).

Run Items

Running Shoes

Socks

Water Bottle

Visor/Hat

Misc Items

Sun Cream

Garmin

Heart Rate Monitor

Talc for inside shoes and socks

Arm Sleeves, for bike and run

Nutrition, gels, electrolyte drink

Wallet, cash

Photo ID and £5 if you need a day race license usually required if you are not a member of the British Triathlon Federation.

Post Race Clothing

Post Race Towel

Post Race nutrition

NB - The night before - don't forget to charge your Garmin or whichever watch/device you may/may not be using on race day.

Post Registration

Set Up transition

Apply Suncream

Loosen Laces, or use elastic laces so there is no need to spend time doing them up.

Check Brakes

Bike in Low Gear

Put race number on belt

Check tyre pressure

Stickers for ID on helmet and bike

I have purposefully not gone into detail about all the various different training schedules for each discipline, there is just too much to say!! Once you have joined the club you are welcome to join any club training sessions where you can seek proper guidance for the length of triathlon you might be considering and join in with proper structured training. You can glean all manner of information from other members too. Experience counts for a lot in triathlon!

I hope that I have managed to dispel some of the fear that as a "newbie" you will naturally be feeling and that I have answered some of those questions you might have thought are too daft to ask! Nothing is too silly to ask any of the coaches or any of our members. We are a fully inclusive club and we pride ourselves in encouraging you to get out there and have a go.... So GET OUT THERE AND HAVE A GO!

Good Luck

Ruth