

Preparing for your first triathlon

We hope that you will have now entered for your first triathlon.

What do I do now?

When preparing for a triathlon there are two things that you have to do develop your fitness and develop your skills:

Develop your fitness

You have entered your race and now the training begins – but what sort of training should you do and how should you do it? First, here are some general tips:

- Consistency is key. It is better to train for 4 hours a week (for example) every week than train 10 hours for one week and then nothing for the next 3 weeks! You should find a balance between your training and your family (they are your supporters) and your work (your entry fees).
- Be specific in your training. Get on your bike and ride! One session a week on a gym bike may be a convenient option but try and get outside on the bike that you will race on at the weekend for a longer ride. Likewise, get in the pool and run outside on similar terrain to your race if possible.
- You must take time to recover. Recovery is the 5th discipline (transition is the 4th). Fit in a lighter week every 3 or 4 weeks as this is when your body adapts and becomes stronger and similarly try to spread your training over the week rather than all at the beginning of the week so that your body recovers well from each session no matter how easy that session may have been.
- Follow a training plan. By following a well thought out training plan you will achieve far more than if you use an adhoc approach. There are plans available in books and online - see what you can find. If you don't want to look very far, thetrilife.com coaches have prepared training plans for you – for your first sprint race, your first standard distance race as well as training plans for athletes that have done a few races and now want to improve their times and beat their friends! Take a look at a sample week from one of our training plans. As you progress through your plan thetrilife.com coaches will be available by email to answer all you questions and keep you on the right track – you won't get that from a book!

But what of specific training in swim, bike and run.....

Swim Training

Your training sessions should try to make the distance that you are going to compete. For a sprint distance this can be between 400m and 750m. Don't worry if you can't complete the distance just yet. Make a note of how far you can swim and the time that it takes you. The next time that you swim aim to swim a little further and longer. By doing this regularly you will soon find that your swimming improves.

The secret to swimming is to relax and not to rush your stroke. Try to go slower and perfect your technique rather than trying to be as fast as you can as this often leads to bad habits. It will help you as you emerge from the water also. If you are too exhausted after the swim you will not perform well on the bike or the run.

Most open water triathlons in Great Britain require a wetsuit to be worn. This may feel strange but it can help your swim. Wetsuits help buoyancy and can aid your confidence. It is recommended that you try the wetsuit before the day of the event as they can feel tight and restrict your breathing.

Swimming should be done as often as possible in your weekly training schedule. These 3 swim sessions should help with your swimming:

1. Swim several repeats of 50m with 30 s rest in between. Once you can do 10 repeats then alternate between 50 m at a hard effort and 50 m at an easy effort.
2. Swim 5 x 100 m with 30 s rest in between each one. As you get fitter increase the number of repetitions gradually up to 8. (If you can't swim 5 right now then build up from what you can do).
3. Swim continuously for 15 mins. At the beginning of the program keep this very easy. Towards the end of the program imagine you are in your race and practice swimming for 15 mins with a strong effort.

Bike Training

This is the longest discipline of the three and many first time triathletes often neglect to give it adequate attention. The most important feature of the bike leg is the bike itself. Make sure that the bike has had a recent service and is in good working order. Something simple like the gears working can make a huge difference to your enjoyment and speed. Make sure you look at the tyres and test to see if they are rock hard. The higher the pressure in your tyres the more likely you are to avoid punctures and the faster you will go due to less rolling resistance. Make sure that the brakes work well.

You must wear a helmet during the bike section of a triathlon so make sure that your helmet is comfortable and tight fitting.

It is not essential to have proper cycle shoes with special pedals although this will help your speed immensely. However, if you are not used to them they can seem tricky at first. If this

is your first triathlon it is a good idea to get toe cages for your pedals and cycle in trainers. This way you will be able to get your feet in and out easily and have the ability to go harder up any hills.

The bike is all about how much mileage you do. Spinning classes are great for building up your strength and stamina. Otherwise just spending time on your bike will help you get fitter. Cycling shorts are a worthwhile investment.

If you are feeling more confident on a bike you could try an interval session during one of your rides.

Find a stretch that is 1 minute long and sprint at the end of the minute allow 2 minutes easy spinning before repeating a further 5 times. Allow 10 minutes more cycling and repeat the set again.

Run Training

This is traditionally the easiest discipline of the three but after a swim and a bike the run becomes a little trickier. Your legs feel numb and don't seem to respond to what you are telling them to do. It is important that you get the strength in for the run during your training. Long steady runs at a pace that you can talk in full conversation are actually very good for developing leg strength. If the furthest you have run is up the stairs or to the bus then build your running mileage up gradually. Start with walking for one minute and jogging for one minute. Every week try to increase the time that you do for this session.

If you are more confident about your running ability then run continuous for 30 – 45 minutes. You could also try intervals. Jog for one minute and run hard for one minute and repeat until you have completed 30 minutes.

Although hills may seem like hard work they make your running far more efficient and add strength to your legs. Find a short hill about 20 – 40 seconds and run up it as hard as you can. Have a breather at the top and jog down. Repeat 4 – 10 times.

Brick Training

You should also try to practice running after you have been cycling or combining cycles with runs – these are called “brick sessions”. This will help get you used to running after the bike leg and will provide you with a great workout. The key is that you change from bike to run as quickly as you can. You may find that you have to run with shorter strides – this is fine. Lift yourself up through your core and get into your stride as soon as you can. Running off the bike will only become easier with practice which is why they are included in the program!

Develop your skills

This is the second area that you need to think about. Do you need some help with your swimming? Could you improve your bike handling skills? And what about transition – just what do you have to do?! Here are some suggestions:

- Find a swim teacher. If you are concerned about your swimming, go along to a local pool and find out the names of local swim teachers – just a couple of sessions could transform your stroke as well as your confidence in the water. They will also be able to tell you where you can find local open water swimming venues.
- Go along to a training day. The Castle Series and thetrilife.com will be hosting a number of training days with the first time triathlete in mind. We will actually lead you through your first open water swim (open water based day)! You will develop your bike handling skills, learn how you can improve your running and (most important) have plenty of time to practice transitions. You will meet lots of other athletes preparing for their first event and you will have fun!
- Join a local club. Your local club will be a valuable source of information and motivation. If you don't have a local club or will not be able to attend club sessions then you can join our virtual club at thetrilife.com. Thetrilife.com is a BTF registered club with an online Clubhouse to provide you with a place to ask questions from an experienced coach, share your race reports, get exclusive deals and discounts from a major UK triathlon retailer (triathlon can be expensive)!, win prizes, see our session of the month and receive training advice in our monthly newsletter.

What next?

If you have any queries please contact your coaches at castlecoach@thetrilife.com.
If you are more experienced and are looking for an advanced sprint or standard training plan or a plan that is tailored to your lifestyle , commitments, strengths and weaknesses then you may like to look at our coaching packages available at www.thetrilife.com.