

## Physical Fitness

Scott Howitt and Steve Bentley

# So You've Decided to Try a Triathlon...

# Now What?

## PART TWO

### Key Training Points

YOU WILL FIND YOU WILL get the most out of your training program by following some simple guidelines:

- Stay consistent with your workouts. Consistently doing your workouts will give you a much better training benefit than any one particular hard workout. If you don't feel like doing a workout some days, just start the workout and before you know it you will often be okay once you are going. Even if you don't follow the stated duration or intensity at least you can get active and focus on good solid technique.

- Remember to go easy on the recovery and longer base workouts and hard on the strength/speed sets. Too often people go too hard on the easy days and not hard enough on the hard days. Each type of workout has a specific energy system that you are trying to develop and going hard all the time will not necessarily translate into better race times.

- Think Technique, Technique, Technique. When developing good form, you'll find doing things more often will allow you to learn the muscle patterning quicker than doing fewer longer workouts. As well, speed equals efficiency. If you have good technique, then you will be more efficient and the ener-

gy you expend in your activity will go into moving you forward faster rather than in trying to control unwanted body movements.

- Nutrition and sleep are very important to allow you to get the most out of your workouts. This is especially true for your longer base workouts. Ensure you eat well the day/evening before a long ride or run.

### Nutritional Guidelines for Triathlon Training

Nutrition for a race should start days before your actual race day. Make sure you are eating a good balanced meal consisting roughly of 60% carbohydrates, 25% protein, and 15% fats. If you don't fill up your muscles and liver with glycogen before the race starts, then you aren't going to be able to keep fuelled properly on race day.

Race morning eat a complex carbohydrate meal consisting of food you are used to, ideally oatmeal, breads, etc, with some fats (peanut butter) and fruit that you can handle (bananas). Right before the race, consuming an energy gel can give you the fuel you need to get you through the swim and ready for the rest of the race.

Specific race fuelling strategies depend on the length of the race, weather conditions, your goal race



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intensity, and what you can handle in your stomach. You should always practice your fuelling strategy in your training sessions so you know what will work and what won't; this allows for adjustments to make it perfect for race day. Generally you should be striving for a consistent intake of carbohydrates, electrolytes (potassium, sodium), and water. Your fuelling strategy should be based on salt, sugar, and water.

How specific and complicated you want to get with this intake is up to you. Simply put, it is better to take in smaller amounts more often to ensure a steady flow of energy, electrolytes, and water into your system throughout the race. If your stomach decides to stop processing the fuel, it is often due to a too-high

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concentration of carbohydrates. This causes your stomach to shut down, which prevents it from emptying into the small intestines where everything is actually absorbed by the body. If your stomach stops emptying, you stop absorbing; water—you get dehydrated, electrolytes—your muscles cramp, and fuel—you hit ‘the wall’ (run out of fuel).

### Tips for Each Sport

#### Swimming

Typical swimming instruction advises that the swimmer try to extend their stroke out as long as possible in order to present a longer line in the water, with the thinking that a longer object will go faster through the water. Certainly, getting long and stretching out your stroke will reduce body resistance and is a good practice. However, stretching out too far forward puts your arm in a bad position if your goal is to actually swim fast.

A simple tip for beginners would be to swim with a high elbow. Fast swimmers have been observed to quickly anchor their hand and forearm in the water and pull up to push past it. By entering the water at a steeper angle, the swimmer is actually able to get their arm through a stroke faster, and is able to bypass the requirement of pushing down into the water. This high elbow position helps to generate the forearm anchor; however it does require considerable flexibility of the shoulder girdle, as the shoulder is elevated and internally rotated while flexing the elbow.

Common mistakes amongst swimmers include stretching areas that are already flexible and areas not required for swimming, or conversely to strengthen muscles that are already strong. Recent studies suggest that shoulder laxity is frequently involved in shoulder pain in swimmers and therefore a scapular stability exercise program, as opposed to a generalized rotator cuff strengthening plan, is recommended. The defining

aspect of an elite swimmer versus a recreational swimmer is the athlete's ability to reduce the drag forces that slow their forward motion. There is no consensus on the ‘perfect technique’ and not surprisingly different coaches have different opinions. Still, consulting a swim coach will undoubtedly help your form and in conjunction with proper exercises, minimize injury.

#### Cycling

Cycling effectively is all about smoothness and force application in the pedal stroke. To be competitive on the bike you need to learn how to pedal efficiently in order to maximize the energy you expend. To facilitate this you need to be comfortable in an aerodynamic position on the bike. Bike fitting is not an exact science, as there is no ‘gold standard’ way. A good bike fitter has a comprehensive knowledge of positions, and in listening to your goals and considering your races they will be able to find the ideal position for you.

One of the best bike fitters in the business, Heath Cockburn, works at La Bicicletta in Toronto. According to Heath, if your weight distribution is proportionate on your bike, then you can have good leverage over the bike while maintaining proper handling. Better yet, Heath says that “an ideal bike fit can prevent injury, as cycling with the correct amount of extension and reach makes you bio-mechanically efficient and thus you are less likely to suffer lower back pain, neck pain, knee pain, or the bothersome ITB syndrome.”

Once you have been fitted properly, beginner cyclists should concentrate on maximizing efficiency. A simple drill is to incorporate single leg riding into the training program. Learning to pedal with one leg is an easy way to improve pedal stroke technique as it helps to develop hip muscles used in the pulling up motion, as opposed to relying on the downstroke of the other leg to move it

over the top of the pedal stroke. Learning proper timing of riding/pedal stroke is also very important to be successful on the bike and not surprisingly this comes with practice.

#### Running

One tip for running would be to train with high stride rate. The positive effects on your running form from running with a high cadence (low 90s) include:

- establishing a slightly forward leaning body position;
- a more forward foot-strike position (i.e., contact more towards your mid foot rather than your heel);
- quicker rebound off your ground contact leg;
- decreased vertical movement and a resulting increase in the forward propulsion (as opposed to vertical propulsion) of your running stride.

Keep your upper body as smooth and quiet as possible. This starts from the hips and works its way up. Stay relaxed and smooth and try to move your arms more forward and back rather than across your torso. Along with that, try as much as possible to keep your hips and core area firm. Don't let your hips sway from side to side or dip down as the associated hip strikes the ground.

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Kate Tompkins

# Triathlon: The Ultimate Fitness Challenge or Something for Everyone?

MOST PEOPLE WOULD AGREE THAT COMPETING IN AN IRONMAN triathlon is only for the ultra-fit. However, if you're a regular reader of *beyondfitness*, our two articles on triathlon in Volume 1, Number 5 ("The Road to Triathlon" and "Could You Be a Triathlete?") may have piqued your interest and made you wonder if maybe, just maybe.... Or perhaps you're already a jogger, swimmer, or biker, and want to add some variety to your workout routine. You'll be glad to learn that there are many levels of triathlon, and it's a sport for anyone at almost any age.

You've made the decision and you're ready to start training? Or perhaps you've already mastered 'sprint' triathlons and are looking for more of a challenge? Then pick up the appropriate book in Meyer & Meyer Sports triathlon series. As Bob Babbitt says in the introduction to *Starting Out – Triathlon*: "For triathlon, you only need to 'tri'."

## Starting Out – Triathlon: Training for Your First Competition

By Paul Huddle and Roch Frey  
ISBN: 1-84126-101-7

This book contains two eight-week training programs (one for sprint, one for Olympic distance), as well as information on what to expect at a race, strength, weight, and flexibility exercises, and not one, but two, chapters on nutrition and nutritional supplements.

## Start to Finish – Ironman Training: 24 Weeks to an Endurance Triathlon

By Paul Huddle and Roch Frey  
ISBN: 1-84126-102-5

Unlike the first book in the series, this one assumes a pre-existing level of fitness. It then details a 24-week program to prepare you to successfully complete an endurance length triathlon (2.4 mile swim, 112 miles of

cycling, followed by a 26.2 mile marathon). In addition to the training advice, and technique drills, you'll find helpful information on nutrition and hydration, all provided with a lightly humorous touch.

## Lifelong Success – Triathlon: Training for Masters

By Henry Ash and Barbara Warren  
ISBN: 1-84126-103-3

## Lifelong Training – Triathlon: Advanced Training for Masters

By Henry Ash and Barbara Warren  
ISBN 1-84126-104-1

These two books are written from the perspective of those of us over 40 who still want to continue—or start!—in endurance sports. While the authors are careful to point out that Masters athletes can't necessarily match the performance of their younger counterparts (or their younger selves), they offer much encouragement and advice along with the training programs. Helpful tips for race day in each of the three disciplines rounds out their 'you can do it' approach. ■

All four books available from:  
Meyer & Meyer Sport  
Suggested Retail Price \$25.95 each  
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