

# The Beginner's Guide to Triathlon

**S**o you've decided to give triathlon a try. Congratulations!

Now, I may be a bit biased, but I think triathlon is a pretty awesome sport. You'll meet great people from all sorts of backgrounds, you'll get into great shape, you'll push yourself to your limits in order to complete what you never thought you were capable of, and you'll race on the same course as the pros.

Being new to the sport of triathlon may seem overwhelming at times, but don't be intimidated by what's ahead of you. We all started as beginners, we all had questions, and we all made mistakes (they make for good stories later on!).

So, to make the road ahead of you a little smoother, here's a rundown of what to expect and how to plan for your first triathlon.

## Triathlon Race Distances

**Though it is pretty popular, the Ironman isn't the only triathlon race out there. Triathlon races have various distances:**

Sprint Distance is 750 meter swim, 12 mile bike and a 5k run.

Olympic Distance is 1500 meter swim, 24 mile bike and a 10k run.

Half Ironman Distance is 1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike and a half marathon (13.1 miles).

Ironman Distance is a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike and a marathon (26.2 miles).

The best way to start out in triathlon is to pick a sprint distance race. Try not to get carried away and sign up for an Ironman as your first triathlon. Ideally you want to get experience

racing in the other distances and get comfortable with what it takes to complete one.

## Training & Gear

Combining swimming, cycling and running into one sport does require quite a bit of equipment, but you don't necessarily need to spend a lot or buy all new gear when starting out in triathlon. You may actually be able to get by with what you already have.

**The necessities to get started are:**

- Bathing Suit, Cap & Goggles (a swim cap is usually provided by the race to wear on race day)
- Wetsuit if you plan on racing in cold water

- Cycling & Running clothes
- Bike & Helmet
- Sunglasses (to protect your eyes while cycling & running)
- Sneakers
- Water bottle

As you get more involved in the sport, you'll probably want to invest in some higher quality gear and triathlon clothing. While you are the engine that will ultimately bring yourself to the finish line, there is some equipment you'll find especially useful. For example, cycling shoes will help you with power transfer from your feet to the pedals. In addition to adding to your comfort while training and racing, this will also help with speed and race performance.



## THE BASICS

Keep in mind that no matter what level of athlete you are, the key to training is consistency. Sounds almost too simple, but getting in those daily miles without skipping too many days really does make a difference in both performance and injury prevention. Training and taking care of yourself are what will make you a great triathlete and no amount of shiny new equipment will be able to make up for that.

When you start training, build your mileage up gradually. Follow a good plan, be sure to include a reduced mileage recovery week every two to three weeks, and take one day off completely every week. Recovery and adaptation from training are just as important as the training itself.

**Besides swimming, biking & running there are other types of workouts you can include in your training to help you become a better athlete:**

- **Strength, Yoga & Pilates**

Swimming, biking and running can lead to imbalances. By including strength, corrective exercises, yoga or Pilates, we balance out our bodies by loosening up what's tight and strengthening what's weak.

- **Bricks**

To get accustomed to the feeling of running off the bike, it's important to include "bike/run bricks" in your training. In layman's terms, a bike/run brick is simply a bike ride followed immediately by a run. Race day is not the first time you want to be dealing with that strange heavy-leg feeling! Another useful type of brick is



the swim/bike brick, which will help you get used to going from horizontal to vertical.

- **Transition Practice**

Transitions are not something you want to ignore in your training. They're the best way to get "free speed." It's much easier to improve your race time by being calm and efficient in your transitions than the work that's required to get faster in swimming, biking or running.

### Pre-Race

Before the race, you'll want to make sure everything is in good working order. A pre-race tune-up for your bike is always a good idea. No one wants a mechanical breakdown in the middle of their race so, at the very least, you should check your tires, gears and lube your chain.

Check that your goggles aren't all scratched up and make sure you

have a decent pair so you can see clearly during the swim. It's always good to bring an extra pair with you to the race, just in case either you or a fellow triathlete needs it. Karma goes a long way!

### Race Day

On race day, you want to give yourself plenty of time to set-up and warm-up before the start. Unless packet pick-up is available the days preceding the race, you'll be picking up your number on race morning. You'll also set up your transition area, get body-marked (that's where they write your number on your arm and age on your calf) and, of course, visit the porta potty (everyone's a little nervous on race day, so there will be a line).

Always remember – "Nothing New on Race Day." Race day is not the time to try a new nutrition product or new gear. That's what training is for.

Happy racing!

### ABOUT JOAN

Joan Scrivanich is a USA Triathlon and USA Track & Field Certified Coach as well as a Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist. She holds a Master Degree in Exercise Physiology from Columbia University and has been an endurance athlete for over 20 years. Find out more about Joan at [www.RiseEndurance.com](http://www.RiseEndurance.com) and follow Rise Endurance at [www.twitter.com/RiseEndurance](https://www.twitter.com/RiseEndurance) and [www.facebook.com/RiseEndurance](https://www.facebook.com/RiseEndurance)