



NEW TO TRIATHLONS?

Here's some help answering some of your questions. Also, Check out www.triathletemag.com – the February 2009 issue they had a great beginner's guide section. This would be good help for anyone new to triathlon or planning their first triathlon.

WHAT ARE THE TYPICAL RACE DISTANCES?

Sprint – Varies per the race, usually about a 400-700 yd swim, a 8-15 mile bike, and a 2-4 mile run.

Olympic – 1.5k (.93mi) swim, 40k (24.8mi) bike, 10k (6.2mi) run

International – Similar to an Olympic distance, but can vary a little...maybe the swim is a little longer.

½ Ironman – 1.2mi swim, 56mi bike, 13.1mi run

Ironman – 2.4mi swim, 112mi bike, 26.2mi run



WHAT IS A GOOD DISTANCE/RACE TO START OUT WITH?

This is highly personal and dependent on your level of fitness and comfort with the three sports. Many people start out with a Sprint or an Olympic. If you are proficient at two of the three, an Olympic may be a good choice – providing you make the time to train for it. For the Sprint distances there are some great beginner series locally with the Southwest Challenge Series. Take things like this into consideration and don't be shy. Talk to the folks you are training with and those with a little more experience to get a feel for things.

SPEAKING OF TRAINING... WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO DO THIS?

Let's start by saying that everyone is an individual and we all have different needs. You should ask yourself some questions: how much time can I give up for my training and still maintain balance with work/ family/ friends. Be realistic about your goals.

As far as the training itself goes, there is no substitute for good coaching with a real coach. But you've got to get started somewhere right? Picking up a triathlon training book at your local sporting goods store is oftentimes a great place to begin putting together a workout plan. The amount of training depends on: your level of fitness, comfort level with each individual sport, amount of time you have available, and the distance of the race you've chosen. In general, it's a good idea to do each activity at least twice per week, increasing your distances gradually. Don't forget that weight training is an integral component of a training program, so you'll be making time for that too.

Quite often, people's goals are simply to finish the race, enjoy the experience and see what it's all about. You might not be ready to invest in a formal coaching program. You just want to see if you like the sport enough to buy a real bike, right? El Paso Tri Club has some great options for free and low cost training.



WHAT DO I WEAR FOR THE RACE?

Many guys wear a singlet (tight tank top) and a speedo/hotpants. Many women wear a running bra and tri bottoms. Too much for you? Or too little I guess I should say? Options for the more modest: MEN: running shorts and a singlet/tank top. Most races will not let you go bare chested, no stripping in the transition area either. Women: Wear a running bra and the tri bottoms under your wetsuit then pull on some run shorts and maybe a tank top in the swim-to-bike transition. The tri bottoms are like a swimsuit bottom with bike short padding.

“BUT I HAVEN'T GOT A THING TO WEAR!”

Wear clothing that will fit comfortably under your wetsuit. Avoid cotton! Stick to the “tech” fabrics whenever possible. Many men wear a singlet and tri-shorts. Women often wear a sports-bra or singlet and tri-shorts as well. Tri-shorts are simply bike shorts with a much thinner pad that will breathe nicely and dry fast. Most races will not let you go bare chested or do any stripping in the transition area. If you'd like to, pull on some extra gear during your transition – maybe you'd like to run with socks on, or it's chilly and you could pull on a shirt (making sure your race number will be visible).



HOW DO I SET UP AND DO MY TRANSITION WELL?

When choosing your rack pick a spot that you will be able to find EASILY. Maybe this is the last rack in the row or maybe this is the rack next to a tree or other marker. Sometimes you will not have a choice and the race officials will decide for you. In this case you might want to bring your own marker: a balloon, neon tape, duct-tape, a teddy bear whatever works for you! Make it visible. Do a practice run through before the start and make sure you can find your area. Set your stuff up on a towel in the order that you'll need it. Be tidy. The more organized you are now the faster you will be later. Also, be sure to hang your bike by the seat. And don't be shy to look around and copy what other folks are doing – we can all learn something from one another!

When setting up your bike it's a good time to stop and think about your nutrition for a moment. Think about easy access. Many people tape gels to the frame of their bike, or maybe you have already pinned some of these to your race belt or outfit. This way you can just reach down and tear one off instead of fumbling around for it in a pocket.

Now that you're all set up how do you get out of that wetsuit? It's never pretty. And like your transition area, it's all about how well you prepared beforehand. Use a body lubricant generously around your ankles and wrists to avoid having to hop around like a lunatic in a straightjacket.

When exiting the transition area with your bike it is a good idea to steer it by holding the seat, rather than the handlebars. This will help keep you from mangling your shins on the pedals as you go. Practice running with your bike in your bike shoes. Learn to love that 'there's no way this can be safe' feeling.

Coming back in from the bike is called your T2. By this point, simple tasks like tying a pair of running shoes can seem a bit involved. A suggestion might be to try out elastic laces or a quick-cinch like you find on a backpack. Try several easy on/easy off options and see what one works best for you.

No matter how you set yourself up it is always best to practice transitioning before race day comes along. Now that you're a triathlete you no longer can simply think about swimming, biking and running – but how you're going to get from one to the other as well!



WHAT SHOULD I DO FOR MY NUTRITION?

Again this is individual, it's a trial and error process. As much as you are training physically for the race, you need to train nutritionally. As you get some races under your belt you will know what works for you. One important piece of advice: race day is not the time to try anything new! Train with what you'll be racing with. Oftentimes this can mean doing some detective work and finding out what kind of sports drink/bars/gel's are offered at your race and then train with that. If that doesn't work for you, then plan on bringing your own.

The night before – A medium sized meal, heavier on the carbohydrates, not too much protein/fat/fiber. The “carbo loading” party the night before the race is not your free pass to eat 3 plates of spaghetti! Truly the Carbo Loading Party should be 2 nights before the race, this is when you want to increase your carbohydrate stores. For your first race think bland, nothing too crazy. This is probably not the time to try the spicy shrimp and scallop cream sauce. Drink lots of water for a couple days before the race (which you should be doing all the time anyway, right?). If it's going to be a hot race, like Wildflower, consider incorporating some kind of sports drink with electrolytes and salts into your pre-race hydration plan.

The morning of – Again think medium to small sized, bland, carbohydrate based, low fat/protein. Common pre-race foods: bagels, toast, oatmeal, bananas. You want to avoid anything that can upset your stomach (especially when you throw in the stress and strains racing imposes on your gut!).

During the race – For a sprint distance you will likely not need anything except water or maybe a sports drink. For an Olympic distance or longer you need to develop an eating/drinking plan. What has worked for you in training? What are the weather conditions expected for the race? Is it going to be hot? If so make sure you are not just drinking water, you will need a sports drink to replace the electrolytes and salts you will lose through sweating. Do you need solid food? The gel-based supplements (PowerGel, Goo, Clif Shot, etc.) are based on simple carbohydrates/sugars that will enter your system quickly. You need to drink water with them. They will last in your system for about 45 minutes. The bars (Cliff bars, Power bars, etc) are composed of more complex carbohydrate and will take longer to get into your system. They are not a quick fix. For endurance sports, combining the benefits of both is a good way to go. For an Olympic distance many athletes will use 2-4 gel-based supplements and forgo the solid food. You need to decide what is right for you. If you choose to combine the two, one way is to cut the bar into small pieces and stick it to the toptube of your bike frame or put it into a Ziploc baggy. Alternate between a piece of a bar and some gel as you progress through the race, as



consuming a whole bar at one time may make you visit the port-o-potties/bushes on the run portion of you race! The bike and transition area is a good place to consume the gels/bars (don't compromise safety on the bike for a gel though!). Whatever you choose to do, try it out in training first.

COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Bonk – To run out of energy, you need some food!

Brick workout – Two or more events combined; commonly a bike workout followed by a short run to help the adaptation between the muscle groups.

DNF – Did not finish

DQ - Disqualification

Drafting – Following closely behind another biker. This is illegal in races and can get you DQ'd. Learn the rules!

Negative split – Running the second half faster than the first half

On your left – What you should say as you attempt to pass another biker

T1, T2 – T1= swim-to-bike transition, T2= bike-to-run transition

THE DISCLAIMER: None of the above is intended to be a substitute for: doctor's or nutritionalist advice or the individual training supplied by a real coach. We hope we've provided you with some basic information to use as a starting point. The sport of Triathlon is very exciting and addictive! Get involved! The El Paso Tri Club hopes to provide you with a fun and supportive environment, people to train with, and resources for information. See you at the races!