

Triathlon 101

Interested in trying a triathlon, but not quite sure where to start? This article will outline the training basics as well as the equipment needed to comfortably complete a triathlon.

Your first step is to choose an event—and a **sprint** is the ideal race distance. The three legs of a sprint triathlon can range from a 200-yard to ½-mile swim, a 10- to 20-mile bike and a 2- to 3.1-mile run. The swim can take place in either a pool or open water (lake, ocean, river). Most early-season sprints take place in a pool; and these races are best for the first-timer, as a pool is much less intimidating than open water. To pick out your first race, go to www.active.com (comprehensive race listing) or check with the local multisport club in your area.

For your first event, you should not have to buy much additional equipment. Your current bike (mountain or road) is sufficient. Be sure that it is in good working condition and, if not ridden a while, take it to a bike shop for a tune-up. While there, ask them to make sure that your bike “fits” properly. Also, it is a good idea to have a water bottle and cage and a spare tire kit (and know how to use that). A proper fitting helmet is an absolute must for training (never head out the door without it) and racing (required), and padded cycling shorts make for more comfortable training rides.

A swimsuit (one-piece for women; and “Speedo,” compression or tri-shorts for men) and proper fitting goggles are key for swim training. You can find these items at a sporting goods store or triathlon specialty shop. Proper fitting running shoes will make your runs more enjoyable and help prevent blisters and other injuries. If you do not have running shoes or your current shoes are not in good condition, go to a specialty-running store that has knowledgeable sales associates.

Your training routine will depend on your current level of activity and available time. If you are in good health and have been exercising regularly, you should be able to prepare for the sprint in 6-8 weeks. If you are “couch potato,” you should get medical clearance and plan on preparing 10-12 weeks.

On average, most participants will spend @ 20 percent of the total race duration swimming, @ 50 percent cycling, and @ 30 percent running. Your training volume should attempt to match these percentages. Depending upon your current fitness level and your available time, you should train each discipline (swim, bike, run) a minimum of 2 times per week. As your level of fitness improves, or if you have more time, you can increase your frequency to 3-4 times per week.

Your main goal for your first triathlon is to **finish** and your training intensity should focus on aerobic fitness, not speed. During all of your workouts emphasize proper technique while building endurance. Your training intensity should be kept low, a “conversational pace.”

This **week-one** schedule is one example—you could start with more or less hours or more or less frequency in each discipline. Time ranges for swimming sessions are 20 to 40 minutes, cycling—30 to 120 minutes, and running—15 to 60 minutes. An important “combo” workout to include in the later stages of training is the **bike-to-run** or “brick” workout in which you head off for a short run right after a bike session. This will get your legs used to moving from one discipline to another.

Gradually increase the duration and/or frequency of each discipline in **week two** (6.0 hours) and **week three** (7.0 hours). In **week four** cut the total hours by about half (3.5 hours) from your longest week—this is your **rest and recovery week**. Also be sure to include one rest day each week and follow this gradual-build-and-rest pattern so that you have a rest-week immediately before the race.

WEEK ONE	SPORT	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.	SPORT HOURS	TOTAL HOURS
	Swim	Off	20	--	20	--	20	--	1.0	5.0
	Bike	Off	--	45	--	--	60	45	2.5	
	Run	Off	30	--	--	45	--	15	1.5	

This article is only a brief introduction to the sport of triathlon and if you are interested in learning more, there are many other in-depth resources available. In another article, I will talk about the big day. In the meantime, choose a race, dust off your bike, map out a training plan and you will be on the road to finishing your first triathlon.

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