

The Anxious Triathlete presents...

Beginners Guide to Getting Started!

Welcome!

Thinking about doing your first triathlon? You're in good company! Triathlon is a relatively young but growing sport. You already know that it's three sports- swim, bike, and run. But do you know how to get started? This guide outlines the basic things you'll need to know to train for your first triathlon.

1) Are you ready to train?

A triathlon is a physically taxing event. For a sprint distance race, your body will be in motion for anywhere from one to two hours. Some people can gut it out, while others can't get past the fact that they have to swim first!

The first thing you should ask before you attempt a triathlon is whether you have the space in your life to commit to training. You'll be training 5 to 6 hours per week, sometimes twice a day for a shorter race. It can be difficult to juggle life and training, and it's something that every triathlete struggles with. You are not alone! We have resources to help you find more time to train and organize your life around making your health and fitness a priority. Head over to The Anxious Triathlete blog to find tips on making time for training.

So you're ready to make the space for training, but how do you know if you're physically ready to train for a triathlon? Answer the following questions to find out.

Can you swim?

If you said YES: If you can get into a body of water, be it pool, lake, or ocean, and feel comfortable enough to not drown, you're already well on your way to becoming a triathlete. Proceed to the next question.

If you said NO: You have to swim in a triathlon. And it's the first event, so there's really no way around this one. If you answered no to this question, it's time to consider some basic swim lessons at your local pool! Your first step towards doing a triathlon is to get comfortable in the water.

Can you swim 100 yards without stopping?

If you said YES: You're ready to train for the swim! Go to the next question.

If you said NO: Start with some basic swimming to increase your comfort in the pool. When I started my triathlon journey, I honestly had to say no to this one! So before I

started my official training, I spent 2 months going to the pool twice a week to figure out how to swim. Like, how to put on a swim cap and goggles, put my face in the water, breathe to one side swim. Take 30 minutes twice a week to go down to the pool and practice swimming laps. Once you're comfortable with swimming 100 yards without stopping, you're ready to continue!

Can you ride a bicycle?

If you said YES: You're ready to train for the bike! Go to the next question.

If you said NO: Biking is the second discipline of training for a triathlon. You have to be able to ride a bike, be it road, mountain, or cruiser. And you need to have some basic biking skills, like turning and braking, for your safety and the safety of those around you. If you don't spend some time learning to ride a bike and cruise around until you get comfortable. You will spend more time on your bike during training than any other discipline, so don't worry- the literal pain in your butt will fade.

Can you walk a mile?

If you said YES: You're ready to train for the run! Go to the next question.

If you said NO: Running (or walking, it really doesn't matter) is the third discipline of triathlon, the final test before the finish line. In a sprint triathlon, you'll need to go 3.1 miles. If you don't yet have the stamina to walk or run one mile, spend time increasing your fitness level so that you can safely and comfortably tackle your training!

Are you physically active at least 3 days a week?

If you said YES: You're ready to train! Let's do this!

If you said NO: During your triathlon training, you're going to workout 5 to 6 days a week. This means developing a consistent habit of physical activity. Now, you may want to just jump in and start training and say that the training IS your physical activity, but there are a lot of moving pieces to triathlon training. Without an established habit of physical activity, your chances of burning out during training are high. Spend one month getting in the habit of working out. Start with just three times per week, then add one day per week until you're up to 6 days. I don't care what activity you do- you can walk, you can go to a yoga class, you can spend 30 minutes at the gym. The point here is to develop a habit of including space for training in your daily schedule.

The Verdict

If you answered **no** to one or more questions, spend some time working on your baseline fitness before you tackle a full training plan. It's not glamorous, but we want to set you up to have a successful training block, which helps ensure a safe and enjoyable race. Focus on your weakness (whether swimming, biking, or running) and get into the habit of being physically active 5 days a week. For more on baseline fitness, check out my previous posts over on The Anxious Triathlete blog.

If you answered **YES** to all of these questions, then you are **READY** to train for your first race!!! Let's do this!

2) Pick your race

Once you're physically ready to train, it's time to find your race and put your money behind your intention. Signing up for a race gives you a deadline and goal that will help keep you on track. Search for a local race on Active.com or trifold.com. Pick something short, within your comfort zone. This likely means a Sprint or Olympic distance race. While each race's distances will vary slightly by course, generally in a Sprint Distance triathlon you will swim 500 meters (think 10 laps of a pool), bike 12-14 miles, and run 3-4 miles. In an Olympic, you will more than double those distances with a 1500 meter swim, 24-26 mile bike, and 6.2 mile run. Also keep in mind that the longer distance you choose, the more time you'll need to train. A sprint distance is a great way to ease into the sport and get comfortable before scaling up to another distance. Note: If you're racing in a sanctioned race in the USA, you'll likely need to buy a 1 day pass or 1 year membership to USA Triathlon (USAT), the US governing body of triathlon, when you register. It costs about \$12 for a one day or \$50 for an annual membership. You can learn more about USAT membership here: <https://www.teamusa.org/usa-triathlon/membership-services/membership-faq>

3) Find a training plan

Now that you've got your race booked, it's time to look at training plans! If you said yes to being physically ready to train for a triathlon in question #1, then generally you can train for a sprint race in 8 weeks, 12 weeks for an Olympic. You can quite literally Google "Sprint triathlon training plans" and receive hundreds of thousands of results. Look for a plan that has you completing your goal within a comfortable amount of time—not too rushed, but not so far away that you lose focus and urgency to complete your goal. 8 to 12 weeks for a sprint is about right. Also consider whether training by distance or training by time is right for you. For many beginners, training by time is the better route. With this method you'll swim, bike, and run for a set amount of time (usually anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 hours depending on the discipline and goal of the session). This is great for racers who aren't very fast, and for whom it might take a long time to complete a longer distance. It improves your endurance enough to complete the race but keeps you from unnecessarily tearing down your body beyond what it needs to be fit enough for a triathlon. Once you have your training plan set, schedule those workouts on your calendar. Move sessions around as needed to fit in with your busy schedule, but try not to do similar sessions on back to back days (ie, don't swim two days in a row unless your plan calls for it).

4) Get your gear

One of the most daunting things about doing a triathlon is the amount of gear you need to complete a race! Thankfully, you can obtain most of this gear through friends and family, your own closet, or online retailers like amazon.com. The good news is that you need minimal gear to begin training: Just obtain a good pair of running sneakers, a bathing suit, cap and goggles, and a bicycle and helmet and you're ready to get moving!

Download our [gear checklist](#) to see what you'll need to obtain and pack for race day.

5) Fuel your body

With all the training involved in preparing for a tri, there's so much opportunity to eat! Food really is the fuel that helps your body perform. Triathletes love to obsess about what they put in their bodies, from gluten free to dairy free to soy free to vegan only, down to the protein and carbs consumed by the gram per pound of body weight. But it's really so much simpler than that! Basic triathlon nutrition (or nutrition for anything, really) boils down to one thing: the best foods you can consume for your body are whole, real foods that come from nature. That means buying whole fruits and vegetables, lean meats, nuts, and vegetarian proteins. Carbohydrates should come from fruits, whole wheat and sweet potatoes, not enriched white bread or pasta. I don't believe in diets. I don't believe you should deprive yourself of things that are delicious. But I do think that some delicious things are more nutritious for your body than others, and those are the foods you should be eating more of to fuel your training.

The best gauge of your food choices is how you feel after eating them. I love ice cream and red wine, often in combination. But ice cream makes me bloated and gassy (I know, TMI) and red wine makes me puffy and itchy. I know that if I have a 7am bike ride lined up for Saturday morning then I am not eating ice cream or drinking wine the night before. Try eliminating some of these aggravators from your diet for two weeks and see how you feel without them, then note what changes you experience when you (slowly) add them back in. You might have a symptom you weren't even aware of that was caused by what you were eating.

Questions?

The journey's just begun! Come read more over at www.theanxioustriathlete.com
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