

General Safety Information

Triathlon Safety Guidelines

The guidelines listed are not meant to be exhaustive but highlight areas one should consider when participating in a triathlon. If there are further safety concerns, do consult a doctor or coach.

Swim safety

- Most triathlon swims take place in open water, which is more demanding than pool swimming. Practice in open water to get used to factors such as water temperature, waves, currents and lack of lane lines to guide you.
- Use the buddy system during training sessions. Irregardless of how good a swimmer you are, never train alone in open waters or a pool.
- Avoid training outdoors if there is a possibility of a thunderstorm.
- Be aware of any obstacles.
- If the water is cold, do take proper precautions such as wearing a wetsuit and a swim cap. A wetsuit increases buoyancy and helps make the swim easier.
- If you're not a strong swimmer, do start from behind the other participants during an event to avoid getting kicked and elbowed by faster racers passing you.
- If you feel panicky, call for help, stop, or change strokes.
- If you get into trouble during the swim, put your hands in the air, or yell out (or both) to signal the lifeguard.
- If you get tired, turn over and backstroke or another swim stroke like the breast stroke for a minute or so. Doing the breaststroke provides a good breather too. However, do not do it around a lot of people.
- If you are not a strong swimmer, resist the temptation to go out hard amidst the start-line excitement. You'll tire sooner, and your form will deteriorate quickly, slowing you down and using more energy.
- Avoid eating a large meal before your swim. Most find that if they eat within two hours of swimming, they feel bloated and uncomfortable.
- Don't chew gum or eat while swimming.

Cycling safety

• Surface hazards are on every road but are most common near the curb where most of the riding is done. Be prepared for and avoid:

- sunken or raised manhole covers
- potholes
- speed bumps
- stones
- uneven pavement surfaces
- any sharp object
- slippery surfaces (mud, gravel, water) – go slower and turn carefully

• Select and wear a helmet that is fitting as each head is of a different size and shape. If you have children cycling with you, let them pick their own helmets so that they are more likely to wear it.

• Wear reflective patches on your clothing so that you can be easily seen at night

• Do not wear headphones when riding; it decreases your awareness of what's happening around you.

• Bike with the flow of traffic.

• Ensure that your bike is in good working condition.

• Riding in a straight line is one of the keys to riding safely in traffic. Learn and practise this skill by following a painted line when there is no traffic. Also, try to eliminate upper body movement, as it wastes energy, and look straight ahead approximately 15 metres to keep in line.

• During practice in traffic, be sure to use your hand signals.

• Shoulder checking is important to see the traffic behind. Practice shoulder checking in training while staying in a straight line.

• Safely pass others on the left (after looking behind you for traffic), and allow several feet of clearance -- riders in aero position, especially inexperienced ones, sometimes veer suddenly. Get several bike lengths ahead before returning to the far-right side of the lane so you don't cut off the person you've just passed.

• It is crucial to understand the officiating & race rules

• If you get a flat tire, gently slow down to a stop, and walk your bike to avoid ruining your tire and rim.

Running safety

- The running segment often takes place when the temperature is high. Many triathletes suffer from heat stroke or dehydration. Ensure clothing keeps you cool and use sunscreen to protect your skin.
- It is important to stay hydrated. If necessary, slow down or even walk briefly to ensure you get a drink
- If you are fatigued, consume energy drinks as well as water to avoid low blood-sodium levels.
- Wear a good, proper-fitting pair of running shoes to help prevent injuries.
- Lace locks or elastic laces on running shoes are popular time-savers during transitions. Whatever you plan to use, practice before the event.
- Avoid bad arm form. Keep your shoulders down, arms relaxed and avoid excessive arm movements. Preferably arms should be at approximately 90-degree angles. Don't clench your fists.
- Pace your training and allow for recovery days to prevent injuries, burnout, and to also ensure your running experiences more enjoyable.
- Run and walk against traffic in training.
- Practice running when it is hot outside because if you only train indoors or when it is cool outside, your body may not be able to cope with the heat on race day.
- Practice running immediately after biking because running after you bike is quite different from running without biking.

Tips for beginners

- If you are relatively new to physical activity, consult a doctor before embarking on a fitness routine and plan.
- Listen to your body and run at a pace that is comfortable for you.
- Pay attention to the event rules, regulations especially safety details and follow them.
- Be positive as it keeps you mentally strong, even when you are tired.
- Join or form a running group to gain tips and support.
- If you are going to the event alone, have an "emergency" contact number with you
- Stick to sports drinks, food and equipment that you have used regularly and don't try anything new during the event or on event morning.
- Learn more than one swim stroke. Good alternatives for open water swimming include sidestroke, breaststroke, and for some people, backstroke.

Dehydration

- Dehydration is the most common cause of medical treatment following a triathlon, despite organisers providing fluids during the cycle and run legs.
- Dehydration can seriously affect your physical and mental performance (even on cool days). A loss of 2% in body weight through sweating causes an increase in perceived effort, and is claimed to reduce performance by 10 to 20%. A 3 to 5% loss noticeably reduces aerobic performance and impairs reaction time, judgement, concentration and decision-making
- Having access to a drink bottle during training, and carrying a drink bottle around is key to ensuring athletes meet daily fluid losses
- The average adult needs to consume approximately 2.5 litres of water per day. If you are exercising, you need more water. Athletes should aim to consume a minimum of 750ml of fluid each hour.

Heat Stress Facts

- Heat stress during exercise can affect anyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or body type.
- Exercise causes body fluid losses from moisture in exhaled air as well as from sweating. This causes a thickening of the blood, and places a strain on the cardiovascular system (heart and lungs) as the heart rate increases in order to maintain adequate blood flow to the exercising muscles and vital organs. Blood flow to the skin is reduced, and sweating then decreases which causes the body core temperature to rise.
- Heat illness progresses through a series of stages. Initially, athletes experience painful "heat cramps" usually as a consequence of dehydration.
- These can be treated by escaping from the hot environment and ingesting a sports drink.
- If heat exhaustion occurs, the athlete may cease to sweat. This leads to a rapid increase in core temperature, and will result in headache, nausea, dehydration, chills, dizziness, and in some cases, a loss of consciousness.
- Heat stroke is much more serious. Symptoms include a lack of sweat, headache, rapid pulse, altered mental state, confusion, lethargy, seizures, and even unconsciousness and a body temperature over 101°F / 38°C
- If the body temperature is not lowered quickly, heat stroke can be fatal. If you suspect someone is suffering from heat stroke, seek medical help and take immediate action to start lowering the body temperature. While you wait for an ambulance, help the person into the shade or to a cool place, wet their body or wrap them in a wet sheet to increase evaporation, and provide water.

Tips to prevent heat stress

- Gradually work your way up to several hours of exercise in the heat during the first few training sessions
- To ensure that you are properly hydrated, weigh yourself before and after hard training sessions in the heat. If you finish a training session with a weight loss of more than 3 to 4 %, you should practice drinking more while on the bike.
- Wear a white or light-coloured jersey to reflect radiant heat as much as possible. Wear clothing made from "technical" materials that wick perspiration away from your body, and breathe very well.
- Do not use oil-based sunscreens as it impedes sweating.
- When cycling, the wind moving across your body can remove body heat that is produced. Fluid replacement is more easily done during the cycle so take advantage of the opportunity.