

What are you doing this summer? Thinking about trying out a triathlon?

This year you are determined to follow through on your resolutions of “this summer I am going to get fit” or “this is the year I will try something new” or “this is the year I will do my first triathlon”. So now that you are getting a jump start on your New Year or even last year resolutions, we want to help you get your head around getting started!

Surely triathlons are just for the crazy and super fit though right?

SO NO! Most people who participate in triathlons are just normal every day people like you and your friends. It’s a rare thing that someone will wake up one morning and decide to become a triathlete. More often than not, they’ve either seen a race happening in their local area or they know someone that has had a go already. Triathletes come from all walks of life, are all ages and all shapes and sizes. There are many ordinary people and you don’t have to be the loudest – some of the best are also some of the most shy! At Elite Energy events we’ve had people who have various disabilities compete and kids as young as 6 and bigger kids in their 80’s who compete.

So why is it that people participate in triathlons?

Everyone has a different motivation for having a go at anything in life. In triathlon, some of the motivations are fun and friendship, competition, the challenge, a mid-life crisis, for a dare, to lose weight, to improve health, to grow as a person. The bragging rights you get once you’ve competed are huge – how many people at your work or school can put up their hand on a Monday morning and say they did a triathlon on the weekend?

OK then, where do I start with this triathlon stuff?

What races can I do?

Depending on your level of fitness, you may choose to compete in a Novice or Enticer event or you may like to have a chat to a coach about something longer. All Elite Energy triathlon festivals will have events that cater for the beginner athlete. Enticer races are probably the best event to start with as they will generally take you 30-45 minutes to complete. Enticer races will be a 100-300m swim, 6-15km ride and a 1-4km run.

In Australia, the triathlon season generally starts from October and run through to May. In the off-season when it’s too cold to swim, there are still plenty of opportunities to race with the Duathlon season kicking off in June and running through to September. Duathlons involve running and riding and can be on-road or off-road events or a combination of both. So if you’re reading this article and don’t want to wait for summer, have a go at Duathlon.

Food for thought about where you are at and planning for your first race:

- As a guide a beginner might swim 100m in 2-3 minutes, a 10km ride would take 20-25 minutes and a 2 km run 12-15 minutes.
- Make sure you are able to complete the required distance in each leg before you enter.
- There is a collective level of fatigue caused by linking the swim, bike and run together. This means a 2 km run that usually takes 15 minutes might now take you 16 or 17 minutes.
- Running out of the water after the swim and then also after the bike leg is a totally foreign experience for most first time triathletes. When you stand up in the water after the swim it’s not uncommon even in experienced triathletes to fall over again. It’s a good idea to practice both of these before your race day.

Do I need to train before my first race?

While training is recommended, there is no reason why anyone can’t simply enter a race. As a general rule of thumb, if you can swim the required distance (using whatever stroke) and regularly exercise each week you should be okay to race although you will enjoy it more if you prepare yourself first. We have some more information below on what kind of things you can do in general to train, but if you want some

specific advice, get in touch with us and we'll put you onto our coach.

What if I can't swim?

If you can't swim, then the best place to start is probably with a learn to swim group. Most community swimming pools have a "learn to swim" program for adults. Training for the swim by swimming for at least 20-30 minutes 2-3 times per week for 4-8 weeks should have you more than ready to tackle your first triathlon. Another option is to compete as a team or to race duathlons in the winter.

What equipment do I need?

Having the same race suit as Emma Snowsill, the bike that Cadel Evans rides and the same run shoes as Cathy Freeman doesn't mean you know how to use them and nor will it make much difference in a race for beginners! Remember most triathletes are ordinary people, so most of them started out just as you are and only the silly ones bought stuff they didn't need.

You don't need to buy all the fancy equipment for your first race or your second nor really for your first season. Just like anything else, try the sport out first before investing loads of money into it. With time you can worry about, wetsuits, tri-suits, aerobars, deep rim wheels, carbon fibre frames and elastic laces but to start with, let's keep it simple.

Race attire - many first timers compete in board shorts and singlets for the men, while females race in bathers, and some even slip on a pair of shorts or bike knicks after the swim. For the guys, you can do the race in a pair of speedos, but know that you MUST have your torso covered in the bike and run legs.

The swim - goggles and bathers are the minimum requirement. You will be provided with a swim cap as a part of your race entry – your cap will identify your wave starting group. A towel in transition is always a bonus to dry your feet and most people use it as a mat for their equipment. A wetsuit may be necessary if the water temperature or outside temperature is below 20 degrees. You can not wear flippers, snorkels or use floatation devices.

The bike - any non-motorised bicycle so long as it is roadworthy will do. Many people start out with a mountain bike or their 10 speed racer from school. Your helmet must meet the Australian Standards for a bicycle helmet and a water bottle and sunglasses are an added bonus.

The run - all you need is shoes and possibly socks, a hat and sunscreen.

Do I need to see a doctor?

Sports Medicine Australia guidelines recommend all males over 35 and females over 45 should discuss their plans with their doctor first. Likewise anyone unaccustomed to regular exercise or those with health issues should also consult their GP. It is worth booking an appointment with a Physiotherapist and asking them to conduct a musculoskeletal screening if you have had injuries in the past or if you are a male over 35/female over 45.

Do I need some sort of membership to race?

No - triathlon is one of the few sports where an annual membership is not compulsory. Although membership of your State association is encouraged, your entry fee can include a one race membership that covers your public liability insurance while you race. Membership of your state association will cover you for insurance whilst undertaking an organised training session and your race (organised session being that run by an approved triathlon club or by an accredited coach).

Training for your first triathlon

If you want to enjoy your first race a little more, it's worth investing some of your time in training in the weeks leading up to the race. Training is not only a physical thing, you can train your brain too by thinking about the different legs of the race and how you plan to do them – you may decide that you are going to walk the run in your first race because of an injury or just that you haven't had time to do any running at all. As long as you remember that it's not the be all and end all to train before your first race you are in the right mindset to get in there and try your first tri!

If you have the time to train a little for your first race, the following information is a basic and general guide only. As we mentioned at the start, there are many ages, shapes, sizes and abilities of people having a go at triathlon for the first time and for each different person there is a different way to train. A specific triathlon coach will be able to provide you with a more specific program but a good rule of thumb is that the old saying of "no pain no gain" IS NOT TRUE. If you haven't been undertaking regular fitness activities (and even if you have) starting a new activity is going to take some toll on your body and it will take time for your body to adjust.

How soon should I start training?

You can start training whenever you like, but 4-8 weeks should be plenty for an Elite Energy Enticer race.

How often should I train?

1-2 times per week for each discipline should be enough, but the key to training is consistency.

What should I focus on?

If you are or have been a swimmer, bike rider or a runner, work on the disciplines that you are not so good at. Although it is important to work on all three aspects of triathlon, spending time on your weaknesses will get you to the finish line.

How long should I train?

A good way to start is to do a time trial on each distance individually. So if your first race is a 300m swim, 8km cycle and a 2km run, go to the pool one day and time yourself over 300m then another day time yourself over an 8km cycle and then another day go to an oval and time yourself over a 2km run (it's a good idea to leave a whole day between each to give your body a chance to recover i.e. do one Monday, one Wednesday and one Friday perhaps).

From there, you will know then which ones you need to work on more than the others and you can start to build it up from there. If you aim to build up your distances/time spent training by 10% each week until your training time for each discipline is about 10 minutes longer than you think you will take for each leg on race day, then you should find the race a lot more comfortable.

How hard should I train?

Start off slowly, if you are not used to exercise then the intensity of training is what is going to leave you sore the next day. Keep the effort level in the mild or mild to moderate range where you notice an increase in your breathing rate, but where you can still hold a conversation with someone else. Recovery and nutrition is also key in reducing the soreness and fatigue in your muscles, so make sure you:

- Drink water/sports drink while you train, even at the pool
- Eat within 15 minutes of finishing training (a muesli bar or a banana etc)
- Stretch for at least 10 minutes within half an hour after finishing your session (make sure you allow time for that when planning your training)

Swim training tips

Focus on freestyle and try to create a relaxed, long and fluid stroke. Breathing is often the downfall of many beginners. Learn to swim with your head in the water and breathe out your nose and in on both sides. The biggest keys to swimming comfortably is to roll your hips each stroke and lean into the water. If your hips are rolling, it is easier to roll your face out to breathe in. Remember you have goggles on and can't breathe in through your eyes, so don't lift your head up, instead, tip your chin up when you roll to the side.

Swimming with flippers will assist you in your early stages and a great point to start with them is to kick on your back, later, kick on your side and try and get your face in as much as you can, but leave your mouth out to breathe. Do not be dismayed if you struggle initially, even the best triathletes can still remember when 50m seemed like a marathon. If you find it hard to master the basics of swimming then a "learn to swim" class as mentioned previously will be the best place to start. If you are in the Shoalhaven area, get in touch with us at Elite Energy and we can help you learn to swim.

Straight swimming can also get a little boring so why not jazz it up a little by breaking a long swim up into smaller sections i.e. a 600m swim becomes 2 x 100m, 4 x 50m and 8 x 25m or you could do a 500m pyramid of 25, 50, 100, 150, 100, 50, 25m. Take a short rest of between 30seconds and a minute between each effort to help you get your breath back.

Cycle training tips

Simply riding to and from work or getting out on the weekend for a regular ride should be enough. Use bike paths or roads with cycle lanes and make sure you are well equipped with safety gear including lights and bright clothing. Concentrate on spinning along rather than pushing a big gear this means that your front gear is on the small chain ring and the back gear is on the big one. Try and keep your heel down as you pedal and your arms bent and relaxed. A big smile on your face will help too!

Run training tips

Running can take a heavy toll on the body because of the constant pounding. The best option is to start out walking and gradually add some jogs into the walk. Short quick strides are the most efficient way to run. If you find that you are having difficulty running on hard surfaces (commonly felt as soreness in the shin bones), start by running on a grassy surface. It's always a good idea to walk the grassy track you intend to run first to check for pot holes and other hazards. As you run, stretch yourself up tall, relax your shoulders and hands and keep your chin up. Think light, feel light and in no time, you'll feel like your floating rather than running!

If you are not running at all, a good way to start building up your running is once you have warmed up a little, do a 20 minute session starting the first session with power walking for 4 minutes then lightly jogging for 1 minute and repeating this four times. If you succeed in this without killing yourself, the next time you head out, try reducing the power walking to 3:45 and increasing the jogging to 1:15 and so on for each session after that until you can manage a nice slow jog for 20 minutes.

What is a brick?

About 4 weeks out from your race start to incorporate some bricks into your training. This means following your Saturday ride with a short run of 5-10minutes immediately off the bike. This should help prepare your legs for the bike to run transition come race day.

Keep a diary

A diary will provide you with feedback on how your fitness has improved and guide you on your long term training goals.

Race day

A comprehensive guide to races managed by Elite Energy can be found on our website (www.eliteenergy.com.au) but some quick points can be found here.

Are there rules to follow?

Triathlons like most sports have rules. Rules assist in making the event as safe and fair as possible. The most important rules are

- If you get in trouble on the swim, simply raise your hand and a support vessel will come to help. You can even catch your breath while you hold on.
- On the bike always ride to the left, and remain 7 m behind the bike ahead of you. If you pass another cyclist try to do so as quickly as possible (15 seconds) so you do not block the lane. Riding two abreast is not allowed.
- Always overtake on the right hand side
- Always obey the road rules, most events are not on fully closed roads
- You must always wear a helmet whenever your bike is off the rack
- You can not ride in transition you must get on and off your bike at the mount and dismount lines
- Your chest should always be covered by a top when riding or running.

Tips for your first triathlon

Pre-race

- Have something to eat 2 hours before the race, some juice, toast or a sports drink is ideal
- Use the checklist below to make sure you have all the equipment you need
- Get to the race about one hour before the start
- Register to get your race number and pre race instructions
- At registration, you will need to show ID and your membership if you are a Triathlon Australia member. If you are not a member, you will be required to pay a one race

- membership which is added to your entry fee.
- Read the maps and race instructions on display
- Pin your race number to your top if appropriate
- Take your gear into the transition area and rack your bike in the appropriate rack (race and age group). The earlier you arrive the better your rack position.
- Find out what wave start you are in i.e. males under 40 or females over 40
- Find a land mark that will help you find your bike
- Ride or run the course (or parts of it) if you have time
- Check the swim entry and exit; look for land marks you can use to swim towards.
- Make sure you are back in time to listen to the pre-race briefing. This is where the race director will explain the course and any specific points of interest.
- Fill your water bottles and lay out your gear neatly near your bike.
- Relax and enjoy the experience, don't be afraid to ask questions.
- Don't be intimidated by all the flash bikes, remember everyone starts out just as you are now.

Swim

- The start can be congested, start at the back and to the side if you are not a strong swimmer.
- Just try to follow those ahead of you.
- Try to remain calm and relaxed.
- Stand up when your hand can touch the ground with your hand at the end of your swim.
- Take it easy when running to your bike (some people get a little light-headed).

Bike

- Put your helmet on before you take your bike from the rack.
- Run to the mount line wheeling your bike and only get on when the marshals instruct you to do so.
- Take it easy at the start of the ride, get your breathing under control and find a comfortable pace.
- Remember to drink.
- Dismount only when the marshals tell you to and run your bike to your rack.
- Only take off your helmet when your bike is racked.

Run

- Put on your shoes
- Make sure you know where the run exit is and take it easy at first, save the sprint for the finish line.
- Slow down at the aid stations to make sure you get enough to drink
- Enjoy the finish

What's Next

So you conquered your first triathlon, what's next?

Most people use their first year to simply experience the joys of racing, however there are plenty who are hooked after their first race, and want to move on to bigger and better events. Joining a club is probably the next step as they will be able to provide you with the training options, guidance and support required. Once you have made a commitment to join a club, joining your State association is the final step in your transition of becoming a TRIATHLETE!

Your state association is responsible for governing the development of triathlon through its affiliated clubs and coaches, and plays an important role in the quality control of triathlons by sanctioning races to ensure safety and excellence in race organisation.

Your membership includes

- 24 hour personal accident and public liability insurance whilst racing and training
- A discount on race entry
- Regular member newsletters
- Eligibility for State Championships awards
- Eligibility for national and international events and teams

- Access to development and coaching services
- A range of discounts a sponsor stores
- The feeling that you are contributing to the development of triathlon

For more information

Your state association website should be able to provide you with all the information you require to make the most of your triathlon adventure.

Good luck and see you at the races!

This article has been prepared by Fiona McWhinnie and is based on an article written by Nigel Pietsch from Triathlon SA.

Your triathlon Checklist

General gear

- Sports Bag
- Sunscreen
- Towel for transition
- Race Number (not provided at all events)
- Sports Drink
- Energy Bar/ food
- Band-aids
- Vaseline

Swim

- Bathers/Race Suit
- Goggles
- Extra towel
- Wetsuit (optional & where conditions permit)

Cycle

- Bike
- Bike Shoes
- Helmet
- Spare tube & pump
- Bidon of Water
- Bidon of Sports Drink
- Socks (depends on length of event)

Run

- Running shoes
- Cap / Visor
- Sunglasses
- Socks (depends on length of event)

Post race (keep this stuff out of transition so you have access to it after the race while others are still competing!)

- Extra towel (to dry off)
- T-Shirt/Jacket/jumper
- Shorts/Track suit
- Sandals/shoes/flip flops
- Water/Sports Drink (although these are available in the recovery area)
- Energy Bar/Muesli Bar (fruit will be available in the recovery area)

Disclaimer: *This article is a general guide only and is aimed at adults considering entering into a triathlon race. Although this has been prepared by a qualified triathlon coach, specific medical and training advice should be sought from qualified professionals for each individual.*