

## Chapter 1

# Training for a Multi-Sport Event

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Getting ready to get moving
  - ▶ Defining what *tri* means for you
  - ▶ Knowing what to expect on race day
- 

**W**elcome to the sport of triathlon — a race that combines swimming, cycling, and running in one event. Although the growth of the sport may make it seem as if everyone around you is training for a triathlon, you're actually joining a small minority — a group that the rest of the population might call either remarkably fit and dedicated, or just a little bit nuts. The degree of nuttiness they may attribute to you will be in direct correlation to the distance of your event — the longer the event, the crazier they may think you are.

But while others are scratching their heads, you'll be on your way to complete fitness — improved cardiovascular health and aerobic endurance, as well as powerful, toned muscles. But that's not all. Training for a triathlon is a social event, too — triathlon training clubs are popular with experienced athletes as well as new ones.

So what are you waiting for? This chapter launches you into life as a triathlete.

## *Defining Your Triathlon*

You've decided to do a triathlon. But what exactly does that mean? Going from one sport to the next, and the next again, challenges all your muscle groups — and your mind. The distance of your event will determine just how great this challenge will be. And the goals you set for yourself will determine what you take away from the experience.

## A brief history of triathlons

Triathlon is a relatively new sport — the first one took place in San Diego, California, in 1974. Four years later, the first Ironman triathletes crossed the finish line in Hawaii with a time of 11 hours, 46 minutes, and 58 seconds. Since then, triathletes have cut that time to the 1996 record-setting 8 hours, 4 minutes, and 8 seconds.

Triathlon became an Olympic event in 2000, at the standard Olympic race distance of a 1500m swim, 40K bike ride, and 10K run. Once reserved for elite athletes, the growth and popularity of the three-sport event has made it accessible and as easy to find as local road-running races.

## Choosing a distance and event

For most first-timers a triathlon is a Sprint-distance event — an 804.7m (0.5-mile) swim, a 19.3K to 25.8K (12- to 16-mile) bike ride, and a 5K (3.1-mile) run. A Super Sprint is slightly shorter than a Sprint, but it's a less common event distance. After you have a triathlon under your belt, you may decide to take on a longer event — such as an Olympic, a Half-Iron, or the extremely challenging Ironman.

Unless you've been drawn to do a triathlon by a specific fundraising race in your area, your first step will be to select an event in a location that's accessible to you and in a time frame that gives you enough time to train. In Chapter 2, we offer tips on how to pick your first race. In Chapter 19, we offer a list of resources for finding local, national, and international races.



Choose a race that's first-timer friendly, close to home, and easy to get to.

## Setting your triathlon goal

The reasons for participating in a triathlon are as varied as the athletes you'll see at the starting line — people of all sizes, shapes, and abilities. They're all there to test their endurance and meet their personal fitness or life goals.

Depending on your fitness level, your goal may be to finish your event in a certain time — or simply to finish. And for your first triathlon, that's the best place to start. If you're determined to be a little more specific about how and when, remember these goal-setting tips:

- ✓ **Stay positive.** “I will finish” will keep you far more motivated than “I won't finish last.” Focus on what you *want* to do — finish happy and strong.
- ✓ **Stay personal.** If you want to focus on where you'll place, make this goal about *you*, not the other triathletes. Set your goal about your own



personal finish time or how you'll feel when you finish, not about where you'll finish in relation to everyone else. Your triathlon is about *you*.

If you've entered road races, swims, or cycling events in the past, you may be tempted to set a goal time for your event. If you want to set specific time-related goals, set these for your training sessions, not for your first event. So many factors can influence your race time — water currents, wind, course elevations, even the number of other triathletes competing in your event. You don't want to be disappointed that you didn't meet an arbitrary collection of hours, minutes, and seconds for an event you finished successfully in every other way.

## Evaluating Your Equipment Needs

You have ambition. You have some degree of fitness. And you have enthusiasm. Still, you may be lacking a few essentials — wheels, clothing, or shoes.

Following is a list of the basic equipment you need to complete a triathlon. Buy them now and start using them in your training. You'll want to use for your event the same clothing and equipment you train in.

- ✓ **Tri suit:** Available in one or two pieces, tri suits fit snugly and feature quick-drying fabrics and padded shorts for the ride — you don't want to have to change any clothing during your event. Tri suits look serious. Even the idea of *wearing* one can be intimidating. You may think that only the experienced or elite triathletes will be in tri suits, but the tri suit is a great choice, especially for beginners, because it simplifies your event and your transitions.

An optional piece of equipment is a wetsuit. A wetsuit gives you warmth and buoyancy and helps you glide through the water. Water temperature and race rules will dictate whether you can wear a wetsuit.

- ✓ **Goggles:** Goggles protect your eyes from the chlorine or saltwater to help you see where you're going during your swim. Find a pair that fits your face and doesn't leak or fog. Buy a few pairs and pack them in your race bag — you won't want to swim without these.
- ✓ **Bike:** The bike is the most expensive and most complicated piece of equipment you need. If you're in the market for a new bike, visit your local bike shop and share your goals with a salesperson. If you have a bike in your garage or can borrow one from a friend, bring that to a bike shop to have it tuned and to be sure it fits you correctly.
- ✓ **Helmet:** A helmet is an absolute must-have. Don't ride without one — *ever*.
- ✓ **Other bike accessories:** Consider cycling gloves, cycling shoes, clipless pedals, and sunglasses — for comfort and efficiency, and to increase your safety.

- ✓ **Running shoes:** Just as you have shoes for work and shoes for play, maybe shoes for one outfit and one outfit only, you need shoes just for running. Invest in a good pair of shoes designed just for running, not cross-training or tennis or basketball. You'll appreciate the cushioning on your joints and reduce your risk of injuries.

In Chapter 3, we provide a comprehensive list of all your equipment needs — including what to look for when you're shopping and how much you can expect to spend.



With all the equipment options, it's easy to get overwhelmed and think you need the newest, shiniest, and most aerodynamic equipment you can find and afford. Not so. The most important factor in finding equipment is fit. You can spend a bundle on a high-end triathlon bike, but if it doesn't fit your body, you may as well grab yourself a tricycle.

## Taking to Your Sport

Whether you're experienced in one or more of the sports or you're a long-time athlete who's practiced all three of them, putting them *together* requires practice and attention to form.

### Finding your form

Even if you already enjoy each of the sports and are comfortable racing or training for a single-sport endurance event, when you train for a triathlon, you'll save energy and improve performance by focusing on the fine points of efficient strokes, spins, and steps:

- ✓ **Swimming:** There are five basic steps to an efficient and powerful swim stroke: hand entry, catch, pull, push, and recovery. In Chapter 5, we provide details on proper form and body position in the water (complete with illustrations).
- ✓ **Cycling:** If you remember riding around your neighborhood as a child, you may be surprised to know that there's a *technical* aspect to riding that can make your journey around the block easier and more fun. For more on cycling mechanics and form, turn to Chapter 6.
- ✓ **Running:** Most first-time triathletes are anxious about at least one of the sports. If swimming isn't your fear, odds are, it's running. For tips on staying on pace with your running, check out Chapter 7.

## *Making time for transitions*

The links between the three sports in a triathlon are called *transitions*, and in a triathlon there are two — one from the swim to the bike (called T1) and another from the ride to the run (called T2). Transitions take place in a designated area where you'll rack your bike and lay out everything you need for your event.

Getting from your swim onto your bike can take anywhere from 5 minutes to 20, depending on how well prepared you are before your event and how much you practice going from one sport to the next.

If you follow the training schedules in Chapter 10, you'll put two sports together before your event, either going from a swim to a bike ride or a ride to a run. You don't have to train in all three sports in one day, but you'll definitely want to get your muscles used to going from one sport to the next in dual-sport workouts.

On your two-sport training days, you can set up a transition area to practice placing your gear and getting it on and off quickly and easily. For transition tips, turn to Chapter 8.

## *Training on a Schedule*

You *can* train for a triathlon and have a life. Training for any distance event is a commitment. We can't promise it won't consume your mind, but we can offer training guidelines so that your time in the water or on the road doesn't chew up every available minute of your day.

In Chapter 10, we offer detailed week-by-week training schedules for each of the event distances. But before you start following the schedules, be sure you can comfortably do the first week's training for each sport. If not, spend some time building your endurance in the sport(s) in which you're weakest.

When you have a solid fitness base, you can train for a Sprint triathlon in as little as four hours a week over a 12-week period. That's doable.

As you increase your event distance, plan to increase the time you spend training — in some cases, double that time. For example, to prepare for an Olympic distance, you'll want to allow for eight hours a week for 20 weeks. A Half-Iron will demand at least ten hours a week for 24 weeks.

An Ironman — well, forget what we said about not consuming your life. You *will* eat, sleep, and breathe triathlon training for the better part of a year, or at least 30 weeks. Everything you do, you'll think first, "How will this affect

my training?” But by the time you get to the point where you’re ready to compete in an Ironman, you’ll be so hooked on triathlons that this will actually sound *good* to you!

## *Fueling your body and mind*

We believe you can fit triathlon training into any lifestyle, but you do need to be prepared for it to take hold in areas you didn’t expect. To maintain your energy and your motivation, you’ll be making changes to your diet, your sleep habits, and your way of thinking — and if you’re following a plan and staying focused, these changes will all be overwhelmingly positive.

After you begin training, you’ll find it easy to identify those days when you didn’t get enough sleep or eat a nutrition-packed meal. Even what you’re *thinking* can affect your workout that day.

As you train, you’ll begin to focus on how your body works, not so much on how it looks. Eat a bagel and drink a cup of coffee for breakfast and then try to get through a tough swim or an 80-minute bike ride. You’ll notice how it affects your performance — and you’ll grab that protein- and carb-rich breakfast and an extra glass of water the next morning. (For specifics on how to fuel your body with good nutrition and hydration, check out Chapter 9.)



Try this exercise some day while you’re training: Tell yourself you’re tired, you can’t do this, you’ll never make it to the next telephone pole . . . and you won’t. If you focus on bad thoughts, stress, or anger, you’ll feel your form fail and your speed slow. Go out and keep your thoughts on your power, your strength, how good it feels to be moving, and you’ll keep moving. Yep, your mind is *that* good.

## *Strengthening and stretching your limits*

Training with weights can help you to build stronger muscles, and the power from your pumped muscles can improve your overall triathlon performance and reduce your risk of injury. Don’t worry — you don’t need to spend hours in a gym. Performing two exercises, twice a week, for each of your major muscle groups — chest, back, biceps, triceps, core, hamstrings, and quadriceps — can yield dividends.

Treat your working muscles right with some gentle stretches, too. Improving your flexibility will ease sore muscles, especially in your neck, back, and shoulders after a long bike ride.

In Chapter 11, we give you a quick and easy strength-training and stretching program to enhance your triathlon training.

## *Looking Forward to This Race, and the Next One, and the Next One . . .*

Thinking about how you'll complete your triathlon right now, as you're reading Chapter 1 of *Triathlon Training For Dummies*, may feel like you're getting ahead of yourself. But visualizing how you'll perform in your event will have two benefits:

- ✓ It will keep you motivated to get there.
- ✓ It will help you plan well for your event day.

Beyond sticking to your training schedule and making sure your gear fits and functions properly, preparing for race day by packing well and arriving early can make a big difference in how smoothly your event goes.

## *Knowing what to expect during your first race*

To prepare for your triathlon, be sure to review all the information available on your event's Web site and read Chapter 14 of this book, where you discover what you need to do when you arrive at your event.



Most important of all: Arrive early. Give yourself at least two hours before your event starts to:

- ✓ Park your car.
- ✓ Unload your equipment.
- ✓ Stage your transition area.
- ✓ Find out how to get to the water and back to the transition area, how to get in and out of the transition area, and in what direction you need to go when you're on your bike and starting your run.
- ✓ Get your wetsuit on, if you're wearing one.
- ✓ Stretch and focus.

## *Thinking about what you'll do next*

Yes, we really said it: What's next? If you've accepted the triathlon challenge, be prepared for the possibility that you'll be hooked. And if you are, it's easy to think bigger, better, faster.



Slow down. Remember to give yourself time to enjoy your accomplishment and accurately assess your performance. Chapter 15 is filled with great blah-busters to help you overcome any post-race burnout and helpful tips to get you headed in the right direction for your next event.