



Triathlon beginner's guide

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Triathlon beginners' guide

Welcome

Congratulations on making the first step to become a triathlete! Whatever your motivation is, like just being healthy or strong or if you want to belong to a super community or anything else, your journey starts with a decision and by downloading this ebook you made that decision!

If you are new to triathlon, this world can seem complicated and overwhelming. Simple questions like where do I start, what should I focus on and what is the right equipment can already consume so much energy that it's difficult to get going.

Therefore I wrote this simple guide in which I will go through many of your question how to start your triathlon journey.

Are you ready to start the journey which will change your life?



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Trainings and preparation

Like many difficult things in life a good preparation for a triathlon is all about consistency and never giving up. It takes a lot of time, energy and focused effort to be able to train your body to be able to endure long periods of intense performance. Therefore it is very important that you measure your abilities in the different areas (swimming, running and cycling) before you even start to train yourself.

You have a few options how you would like to handle your preparation and participation in triathlon. Also make sure that your body can actually handle the endurance you are going to expect from it, so perhaps it is good to check with your doctor if your plans are realistic and healthy.

If all that turns out to be good, you can actually start to train yourself. Some people prefer to do it all by themselves and read about it a lot. Others prefer to train with others. Below I have described some of the methods you could consider to enable you to train better.

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Local team

The easiest thing you can do is to check if there is a local triathlon club in your neighborhood and join their training sessions which are usually led by a coach. This option is great if you prefer training with mates, need that additional push to go out the door.

On the other hand the trainings are at given time slots so you might lose flexibility. Are those trainings personalized to your goals and fitness? Usually not. Most of the times they are general training plans which take no personal needs and specifications into consideration.

But e.g. the coach can help you to improve your technique if you just start your journey to learn freestyle swimming.

Online personal coach

Working together with a coach online is a growing popular option. This works the best if you have the technical basis of the 3 sports because an online coach cannot stand next to you during your trainings.

How that works is that you will receive a plan for a week or a month, depends on the coach and the package you choose, complete the trainings and the coach will give you feedback.

Of course it's also possible that you make a video e.g. about your swimming from time to time and your coach will see that and be able to correct a few technical details based on that.

This option is providing you the flexibility of training time during the day and the coach will also take into your work/family schedule for the certain week.

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Training plan

If an online coach is a bit too much for you yet, or too expensive, what about considering to purchase a training plan for the specific distance and beginner level? Most of these plans will give you a solid training basis and they are most of times very affordable. You do not even need to have a special training application to follow these plans, you can purchase them e.g. in PDF format, print out and follow.

If you prefer to start with using a prepared training plan you can check out my [my plan for beginner level](#). This beginner plan contains the trainings and the schedule which will lead you to finish your first half distance triathlon.

You can see that there are many options to choose from to reach your goals in triathlon! Whatever method you choose, training for a triathlon will be a great journey.

You will need quite some time and effort to get to that race start line, you will face difficult days but seeing your body and mind getting stronger everyday and finishing the race is definitely worth it!

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A moment you will remember forever!

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Choose a race!

As mentioned previously, your goal does not have to be by definition to complete a race, it can also be to become fit, healthy, belong to a community or anything else.

But let's be honest, 99% of triathletes love racing! Does it mean you have to beat someone else? No, of course not. Maybe your aim is to be on that podium, and that's completely fine but maybe your goal is to reach the finish line or to improve your time for that special distance compared from last time. Or just to enjoy being out on the course and cheer up your fellow mates during the running and hug them in the finish line (we will be hugging soon again, right?)

But if you participate at an event, most likely you will be hooked forever 😊

Choosing a race can be an overwhelming and difficult task for many people, for some it will be just obvious...

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Be honest with yourself when you choose a race and think about the below as well before pushing that magical "Register" button:

- Choose a distance where you can prepare for, what is realistic! In your first year in triathlon if you have no serious background in endurance sports, a full distance is really ambitious. I'd not recommend myself, as your joints e.g. need to adapt. If you are not sure, reach out to your coach (preferably) or your triathlon club who have already experience and can help you.
- Know your current limitations! E.g. if you are afraid of swimming in the sea and you do not foresee that the coming months until the race you can work on that, choose a race at another setup. Next year you can work on that limitation and be comfortable and you can race in the sea.
- Be aware of the risks you are taking! Are you living in a super flat country like The Netherlands and would like to choose your first half IRONMAN e.g. in Nice, France where you will need to cycle a course full of mountains? Everything is possible and maybe you love challenges but be sure that you have the chance to get prepared to the specifications of your race. In this case as well, hire a coach who can make sure that you get the special trainings your race requires and that you can handle the technical challenges as well that your course needs from you (e.g. descending skills this case). Maybe you need to travel there to a training camp, to check out the course, and get familiar with the circumstances. Another case, maybe you love racing in cold(er) weather and cannot stand heat. Then racing e.g. in Barcelona Spain is not a handy option.

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Once you have this goal decided, sit down with your coach and discuss what are the key steps to reach your goal and the work will begin! You will be able to create a plan from that dream.



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Gear

Running is known to be the best sport from a "return on investment" perspective as you only need to buy a good pair of running shoes and then you can start running. Well, being a woman I'd also add a good sports bra...but anyway most important is that you do not have to have a fortune to start running, it is easily accessible for most people.

However, triathlon is a bit different but is also does not have to cost you huge amount of investment.

For triathlon as it is a combination of 3 different disciplines (and you can add core&strength as a 4th sport) you will need to invest in a few key areas to be able to practice these sports.

You know as everything in life, you can go unlimited, purchase the best or most shiny products (and yes sometimes those shiny products are also super handy/great quality but it does not mean that those are the only options) but as a beginner I'd recommend you to make the below basic investments and upgrade your gear the coming years when you make the next steps as a triathlete. Because I am pretty sure you will make those next steps 😊

If you want to purchase new gear, you have basically two option: local stores and online stores.

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In 2021 it can be challenging to visit a local triathlon shop but at areas where you have little experience I'd recommend that not online retailers. Personalized items like wetsuits are difficult to buy 'blind' from a website if you have no previous experience what fits you best. Some shops also offer e.g. test days where you can test their wetsuits and running shoes (note: this was the case pre-COVID, I am not sure how the future will look like).

These are the most important items you will need when training for a triathlon:

Swimming

- Swimsuit
- Wetsuit (if your race is in a colder temperature and/or you swim a lot open water)
- Safety bouy for open water swim
- Goggles to protect your eyes from chlorine and/or if you wear contact lenses

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Cycling

- Bike. You can buy this second hand (be sure it has no damage and its safe) if you are on a budget or of course a new one as well. There are 2 basic versions for triathletes, road bikes and time trial (TT) bikes. If you cycle a lot in crowded areas or in mountains, then a race bike is a more handy choice, surely as a beginner. If you cycle in little traffic and would like to race a lot on flat courses, TT can be also a great fit.
- Bike shoes. These mount to specific clip pedals, provide you the benefit to push max effort on the bike and it also means that your legs are safe when cycling they do not slide on the pedal. However if you feel that this is a step too far to begin with, you can use also a normal running/sport shoe and normal cycling pedals and consider this upgrade at a later stage.
- Clip pedals
- Helmet. Really important!!! Always wear helmet when training on the bike. You cannot grab your bike at a race either until your helmet is not secured on your head.
- Appropriate clothing. A set or two for warm temperatures and also some clothes for the winter, make sure they are comfortable, absorb sweat, do not irritate your skin.
- If you face a cold winter then an inside Tacx comes in handy. There are 'old school' types which are cheaper and also the super smart versions providing you all data. You can surely manage with the first version as well if you are on a budget, the smart trainers are pricy items.

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- Sunglasses to protect your eyes, the same you can wear on the run as well.

Running

- Running shoes. As mentioned already, this is a key item as you need to protect your legs, your knees. Go for a scan if you are not sure which type of running shoe you need as there are hundreds of different products out there.
- Weather proof clothes. Depends of course on the climate you live, might be only some shorts and T-shirts, other people will need extra gloves, running tights, shirts and windproof jackets as well.
- Good pair of socks which prevent you from blisters.

Extra

- Triathlon suit. If you would like to do a race in the same piece of clothes, then you will need a specially designed triathlon suit. It has some padding for the bike to prevent your critical areas but also leaves you to move comfortable on the run.
- Nutrition. This is an area which you need to practice at your trainings. If you go for a short like sprint triathlon then you can manage the race without eating at the course. But if your goal is a half distance or a full distance you will need special food and drinking during the trainings and the race as well.

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- A water resistant GPS watch is not a must by any means but one of the best investments to track your trainings and progress. Training with heart rate is also really beneficial which many of these watches already cover.

Does it sound a lot? It might. If you are thinking about doing a triathlon, most likely you have already a few months/ years of sport background, usually running. It'd mean that for the running gear you are already covered. You can also contact your triathlon mates if they can borrow you/sell cheap some used gear if you are on a budget.



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Race day

You made it until the start line! **Be proud of yourself!**

Are you excited? I can imagine. Do not panic, it's normal, I'd rather say it is necessary, why would you do this sport otherwise if it does not have any emotional impact on you? 😊

As the 'big day' is approaching, you can do a set of actions a few days before the race to stay calm and prepared on the startline (besides the preparation of course which you have already mastered at this point and you are in a great form):

- Have some extra hours of sleep in the weekend before, especially for half triathlon and more!
- Be sure you know how to repair a puncture (in case it happens), how to do a small adjustment on the bike if anything would go wrong during the race.
- Check your bike once more before the race!
- Know what gear you will wear at the race, do not make last minute decisions. Same goes for nutrition.
- Check the race course once more, memorize the key areas.
- Know the race day schedule, when you need to get up when do you want to eat, how will you go to the race venue, how much time you will need at the venue before the race.

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- Take everything you need with you.
- Check below site for a standard race day checklist!
[Triathlon coaching - Free downloads \(trifharder.com\)](http://trifharder.com)
- Be prepared how will you get home; you will be sure high on adrenaline after the race but later on also tiredness will kick in, you do not want to start thinking how to get home...

You know that you are best prepared physically and mentally as well, enjoy day!

It's your day, celebrate the hard work you put in the preparation!



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Race finished - what's next?!

You crossed that finish line, great achievement, WELL DONE!!! Celebrate the moment, the hours, the days.

IT IS EARNED, NOT GIVEN! You worked hard for it.

Do not be surprised if you will be filled with adrenaline for a few more days



But at a certain point you will start thinking, what's next?

Maybe you said at the finish line 'never again' but these claims usually do not last long. Once your body is recovered (which can take a few days and at a full distance also 2-3 weeks until you feel again moving) most likely your mind will already look for a new goal, a new challenge, a new accomplishment.

What are your options if you would like to do another triathlon?

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One of the options is to “go big” and increase the distance 😊

You can race a new distance, e.g. if you finished a half distance, you can prepare for a full distance in 1-2 years time after that.

In that case check out the [beginner IRONMAN plan](#).

Another option is the following.

You can also say, OK, I know that I can do this distance, I learned a lot during my preparation and the race, I'd like to repeat it and improve my race result.

If you would like to improve your time, enthusiast and all in your next preparation,

I can recommend you the [intermediate level plan for IM 70.3](#)

The decision is up to you, remember, “hard work always pays off” !



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About the author

Dora Kemecei – IRONMAN certified coach



Dora is a 37 years old triathlete, born in Hungary, living in The Netherlands, Europe. As a child she tried several sports, as almost everyone, swimming, handball, table tennis but ended up at triathlon as an adult.

She ran her first marathon in 2003 and I have been competing in triathlon since 2005.

Her biggest success so far as an athlete is a 2nd place at the Double Ironman World Cup (2010). At the time she was the youngest ever female ultra triathlete. Her personal best on IRONMAN distance is 11hrs 21min.

She gained much experience during the past 15+ years as a triathlete but keeps improving her knowledge every day; in triathlon one keeps learning about the sport and human body - that's why she finds triathlon the sport of the 21st century.

Dora is an IRONMAN certified triathlon coach since 2019. She has established Trifharder triathlon team in 2020 which is a global community of sport enthusiasts.

She holds a fitness coach certification besides her university degree in sport management. She graduated as an Economist and Sportmanager in 2007/2008. I work as a Risk and Compliance advisor at Shell Downstream based in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.