



triathlon

what you need to know

DIGGING DEEPER INTO THE MYSTERY THAT IS TRIATHLON



**tri/ou tips collected from mentors
and personal experience
shared by the amazing kris messner**

Tri/Du Tips Collected from Mentors and Personal Experience

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What to Wear

You really do not want to spend undue time in "transition" (the area where your gear is all set up that you go in to between swim and bike and then again between bike and run) changing outfits and there is no nudity allowed in transition (thankfully). Plan to wear the same thing for all three sports. If it's raining, windy, or cold, a lightweight long-sleeved top pulled on after the swim will usually keep you comfortable enough to finish. Remember that you want to wear items that are close-fitting to avoid "drag" in the water and air resistance on the bike.

You have three options:

1. Bathing suit
2. Two piece tri outfit (top and padded shorts)
3. One-piece tri-suit (built-in padding)

Some women (mostly elite amateurs and pros) swim in just a speedo and wear that the whole race. However, this can present some comfort issues: namely running with a wedgie(!) and riding a bike with no padding. Many women are not comfortable biking and running (or being SEEN biking and running) in a bathing suit, so they pull a pair of loose shorts on over their suit for the bike and run. Just remember that it is very difficult to put clothes on when you are wet and you are not going to want to waste anytime struggling with that in between parts.

Most women wear a tight fitting tank top, with a quick-drying sports bra underneath and a pair of race day shorts that have a light padded area in the bottom. These are "tri shorts" designed specifically with a light pad. DO NOT wear regular bike shorts for a tri. The pads are too thick and will really slow you down in the swim. They won't dry easily on the bike and the padding is very uncomfortable when you are running.

Some women prefer the simplicity and compression that a one-piece suit provides. It will have light padding for the bike, like the tri-specific shorts. Some have built-in shelf bras which aren't always enough support for all women. If the suit doesn't have a built-in bra, or you need more support, then wear a sports bra underneath.

You should NEVER wear underpants with any bike or triathlon shorts or one-piece suits. Padded shorts are designed to be worn without underwear, and wearing underwear will almost certainly cause chafing.

Practicing your Clothing and Nutrition for race day:

Just like you practice the sports, you should practice what you'll wear and what you'll eat for the big day! If an article of clothing or food item isn't working well when you practice, switch it out and practice again.

At least a week before the race, practice all three sports in your race day outfit. Check your body for chafing. Invest in body glide or other lubricant if you find areas that get sore or rub. You can buy body lubricant in any bike shop, or running shop that stocks triathlon items. Also note: baby cream made for diaper rash prevention works pretty well as a lubricant. It's very waterproof! Ideally, set up your bike outside where you swim so that you will still be wet when you get on the bike. Do at least 20 minutes of each sport in your outfit to check for comfort.

Decide about wearing socks: remember that it's REALLY HARD to put on socks after the swim. For a sprint tri, you probably don't need to worry about blistering from not wearing socks. BUT PRACTICE with or without the socks, so that there's NOTHING NEW on race day. Tri-specific bike shoes and tri-specific running shoes are designed to be worn without socks, if you are investing in new shoes for your race.

Practice what you are going to eat before and during the race: For a sprint race, you don't really need anything special for nutrition, but make sure you know how much time you need AFTER eating breakfast and BEFORE you jump in the water so that your stomach isn't upset. Practice eating and then working out for about 1 ½ - 2 hours as often as you can before the race and then DON'T VARY YOUR ROUTINE the day of the race!! You'll have enough distractions on race day to make you nervous; you don't want your stomach to have any reason to revolt on race day....

Practicing Transitions:

One of the challenges of triathlons/duathlons/aquabike is that you have to do more than one sport. It's much easier to run a 5K when you are just doing that event, than it is to run a 5K AFTER you've swam and biked (or ran a 2K and biked if you're doing a duathlon)! Assuming

you've done some "brick training" (see section on this), you are probably ready for the multi-sport aspect of your first tri/du.

But, there's that matter of "transition". This is the time spent switching from one sport to another. In tris/dus, this period is timed and it is **PART OF YOUR TOTAL RACE TIME!** One of the hardest things for new multi-sport athletes to master is how to learn how to set up your transition area and then minimize the time spent on transitions.

First, let's learn how to set up a transition area:

In transition, your gear must be set up next to your front tire (which will be on the ground, or lower than your back tire if your bike is small), and be between the tire and the middle of your bike.

Efficient set up is to have your bike gear in front, since you will use it first, your run gear behind that, and your empty bag either underneath your gear, or behind your gear. Here is a picture of a decent transition setup.



Notice that the bike helmet is on the bike (can't forget it that way) and bike shoes are in front. Presumably sunglasses are in the helmet – if not, they could be on top of the shoes. This person is wearing socks, so they are setup in the shoes. The run shoes and race number (on a belt) are behind the bike shoes. This person doesn't have a hat/visor, but if you wear one, put it on top of the run shoes. Notice how neat this area is. The less clutter you have, the easier it is to find what you need in a hurry.

Like the sports themselves, you should practice transition setup and transitions.

Here's a simple way to practice transitions at home:

1. In your driveway or front yard, set up your transition area as you would in a race scenario: lay out your gear and rack your bike. If you have a bike repair stand, you can use this to simulate a transition bike rack. If you don't, a lawn chair or other improvised solution can be employed. Just attempt to have your bike so that the front wheel is down and the back wheel is elevated so you can put your stuff next to your front wheel.

2. Once you have setup organized, go put on your triathlon clothing (whatever you're going to swim/bike/run in. See section on clothing for tips). Put on a bathing cap and goggles. Now, either jump in the shower, or if it's warm enough, hose yourself off with the garden hose. You need to be WET to simulate race conditions. Ignore the stares from your neighbors who will either think you've lost your mind, or wish that they had practiced transitions at home before THEIR first triathlon!
3. Move quickly from the shower or the hose to your bike, and get ready to ride. You can remove your goggles and bathing cap enroute to the bike. Drop them as soon as you get to your transition area (behind your run stuff is best). Make sure you put your helmet on and buckle the chin strap BEFORE you remove your bike from your improvised racking device. Put on your run shoes and socks if you are wearing them, and your sunglasses. Don't get on the bike right away – you will always have to run a short distance from the rack to the “mount line” in the race, so run to the end of your driveway with your bike, or a short way down your street, then stop and get on your bike.
4. Ride a mile or two. You're practicing transitions, not brick training (see separate section), but you want to have the sensation of having been riding when you get back to your mock transition area.
5. When you get back to the place where you got on your bike, get off your bike. This is your simulated “dismount line”. Run with your bike back to your mock transition area. Make sure your helmet stays ON YOUR HEAD and BUCKLED until you return to the transition area.
6. Re-rack your bike, take off your helmet and bike shoes and get ready to run. Put on your run shoes, put on your race belt, and grab your hat/visor. Walk/run back to the place where you mounted/dismounted your bike and begin running as if you were on the race course.
7. After you've done this exercise, analyze your performance: what can you do differently to make it easier to transition from one sport to the next? You might want to try timing yourself after you've done this once or twice, and see if you can improve your times with repeated practice.

An important note: you cannot control some factors related to your transition times. For example, every race is different in terms of how far you have to travel from the end of one sport to your racking area and then to the start point for the next sport. Obviously that distance will significantly impact your transition time. So don't get hung up on thinking you can practice to achieve a certain transition time and that will be what you achieve in a race. And, everyone in the race has those same distances to contend with in the race.

But you CAN CONTROL how long it takes you to shed gear from one sport to another. Practicing will make you more comfortable with minimizing this time. Also, don't underestimate how hard it will be to do the transitions when you're tired/amped up in a race. Practicing the

tasks needed for transitions so that you have “muscle memory” for putting on shoes/race numbers/helmets, etc. will be very helpful in race conditions.

One other note about bike shoes. In transition, you may see some more experienced triathletes attaching their bike shoes to their bikes (using the cleats on the shoes and various assortments of rubber bands or attachment devices). They will then run barefoot with their bike to the mount line, where they will mount the bike (in a bizarre maneuver called a “flying mount”), and then put on their bike shoes as they begin riding. Don’t let this trickiness freak you out. Most “normal triathletes” never even bother to try this. Just put your shoes on in transition and run with your bike. If you ever do want to try this, make sure you have mastered the trick in practice before even attempting it in a race! You Tube is a good place to learn the trick if you are interested.

Preparing Your Gear Bag for Your First Race

After you decide what you are wearing and eating the day of the race, it’s time to get your gear organized. Make a personal checklist (see the handy starter list below), so you don’t forget anything important. Practice packing what you’ll need in a small backpack or duffle to be taken into the transition area with you. Plan and practice your gear packing several weeks before your race so there are no surprises on race weekend!

Checklist for Transition Area Bag

- Swim: Goggles and Cap (supplied in your race packet). Wetsuit if you’re wearing it.
- Bike: HELMET, glasses, shoes, socks if you need them. Some races will give you a race number for your bike too (in the packet).
- Run: Shoes, visor/hat, sunglasses, run number (in your race packet). Race Belt: invest in a race belt for \$10. Much easier than trying to pin your race number on your shirt.
- Hydration – water bottle(s) for bike, extra bottle of water to sip while in transition, hand-held bottle for run (if you need it)
- Some people like an extra bottle of water for rinsing feet after swimming (especially if you are wearing socks or you have to run through sand to get back to transition)
- If you use nutrition gels (GU), Shot Blocks or any other nutrition on the bike, or plan to eat anything during the race, try it out before the race. Only bring nutrition items you have tested prior to the race with you. Don’t be lured into trying anything during the race that you picked up at the pre-race expo or on the morning of the race, if you’ve not tested it on your body. If you need protein bars or other nutrition immediately following the race, make sure you have that with you too.
- SMALL towel - mostly to dry your feet. Everything else will dry on the bike.
- Any medications/eye drops/glasses you need. Lubricant if you need it. Kleenex is often useful.
- You might want a towel to lay your stuff on in transition, but you will not have a lot of room for a big towel. A small gym towel or mat are good for this purpose – especially if it’s sandy/muddy/wet in transition.
- Plastic bag to throw wet/dirty items in after you finish your race.
- Sandals and clothing to put on when you finish. Not an issue except for bad weather days. Otherwise, you can usually hang out in your race clothing until you get back to

your car. Don't bring your dry "driving home" clothing into transition – leave in the car and get after the race.

- REMEMBER less is more in transition – there's not a lot of room. Don't be one of "those people" who bring a suitcase to the race and set up like they are camping out for the weekend!

Brick Workouts

A great way to beat a training rut and burn more calories is to change things up. **Triathlon training is an effective way to beat workout boredom and train different muscles because you are including three different disciplines into your routine.** Swimming, cycling, and running offer your body a total body workout that is sure to help you burn calories and shed the weight. And because you have three options for training, you are less likely to skip a workout, thus increasing your overall calorie burn.

Triathlon is a sport that combines three separate disciplines, which means the training sessions need to be able to incorporate more than one event. Two of the main focuses of triathlon training are the long runs and rides and the brick workout. I would like to talk about the brick workout, as it is one of the most overlooked parts of training for a triathlon, yet puts the most stress on your body.

A brick workout refers to the stacking of two disciplines during the same workout, one after the other with minimal to no interruption in between. As you switch modes of exercise, your body needs to effectively and efficiently prepare for the next demand while recovering from the previous exercise demand. Your heart rate increases significantly as your body tries to shift the blood flow from the muscles of the first exercise to the demands of the muscles of the next. Brick workouts help your body handle the aerobic, anaerobic, and muscular demands of a triathlon event.

For the triathlete, the most obvious reason to brick train is that this routine follows the specificity principle of training. You do not compete in each phase of the race in isolation. The transition is almost a fourth discipline. You need to train accordingly and practice these transitions from one exercise to another within your training regimen. For the non-triathlete, this style of training is a great way to increase your calorie burn. You can burn close to fifteen calories per minute based on a vigorous effort on both the cycling and the running ends of the workout.

Generally, a brick workout consists of a bike/run workout, but a brick could also be a swim/bike or a run/bike workout (usually seen with duathletes). **I am going to focus on the bike/run. Here are my guidelines:**

Before you begin a brick style workout, you should already be able to do the bike and ride distances planned for your brick.

- When you design your brick workout, the distances you choose should be equivalent to where you are at in your training program.
- If you are building a base or are only focused on losing weight, you should keep your distances shorter and to multiple repeats.
- If you have never tried a brick workout, you should start off with just a 1 mile walk/ jog after biking.

Here is an example of a shorter distance bike/run bricks:

5-mile bike; 1 mile run- repeat four times.

When you are in your building or peak phase, you should be increasing the distance in the respective disciplines and begin to approach race intensity. Your bikes will become much longer and your runs will steadily climb. You will no longer focus on repeats, but look at how long you have to get a workout in. If I have two hours to myself on a Saturday, I will bike for 1.5 hours and run for 30 minutes. As the length of your workout starts to increase, I would recommend breaking it down not by distance, but by time.

You should not plan on scheduling a brick workout too close to a planned race or sporting event, as they can be pretty tough on the body. How often can you do this type of training? You should consider your experience level, your schedule, your body's response, and how susceptible you are to injury. They are usually performed once a week, sometimes every other week.

When you stop biking and start running your legs may feel heavy and a bit strange. This heavy feeling in your legs, in my opinion, is why it is referred to as a brick workout. **It will feel like you are carrying two cement blocks on the ends of your legs. As you begin the run, focus on making yourself do it, one leg over the other. As your body gets used to the change in demand, you will develop a rhythm.**

Whether you are doing a multiple repeat style workout or a long duration bike/ ride, keep your time in transition as minimal as possible. **This is the key to this type of workout. You need to listen to your body, however, and slow down if you feel a cramp during the initial stages of the second exercise. It is not uncommon to experience cramps when you begin using the style of training. As your body adapts, they should subside.**

20 minute workouts for endurance athletes

To most non-athletes, 20 minutes of exercise seems like an eternity. But to endurance athletes in marathon training or triathlon training, a 20-minute workout may seem like it's hardly worth the bother. After all, if your average workout lasts an hour, what can a 20-minute session possibly do to increase your fitness? Quite a lot, actually—even for the fittest endurance athlete.

Consider these four benefits:

1. 20-minute workouts burn a meaningful amount of calories and, thereby, help you reach and maintain your optimal racing weight. For example, a 150-pound runner burns approximately 280 calories in a moderate-intensity 20-minute run. If you normally miss a scheduled longer run roughly once every 10 days due to lack of time, you could burn an extra 10,000 calories over the course of a year by squeezing in 20-minute runs instead.
2. 20-minute workouts provide extra repetitions of the running stride, swim stroke, or pedal stroke that stimulate improvements in efficiency. A big part of what makes you a better, more efficient swimmer, runner, or cyclist is simply time spent practicing the movement. So, even short workouts count as additional movement practice.
3. 20-minute workouts can increase endurance by adding to total weekly glycogen turnover. An interesting Scottish study found that weekly training volume was a better predictor of marathon performance than the distance of the longest training run. In other words, the study suggested that marathon runners are better off running 50 miles a week with a maximum long run of 16 miles than running 40 miles a week with a maximum long run of 22 miles. The reason is that endurance improves through the repeated depletion of muscle glycogen stores in training. And a heavy week of training will result in more total muscle glycogen depletion, and thus build more endurance, than a lighter week. 20-minute workouts can add a meaningful amount of glycogen-depleting volume to your training week.
4. 20-minute workouts can produce an excellent high-intensity training stimulus. A little swimming, cycling, or running at anaerobic threshold intensity and above goes a long way. Twenty minutes is plenty of time to get all the high-intensity work you need to take your fitness up a notch.

There are basically two ways to incorporate 20-minute workouts into your marathon training, triathlon training, or any other endurance sport training. One is to do a 20-minute workout instead of taking a day off whenever you are too pressed for time to complete a longer workout.

The other way is to add one or more 20-minute workouts to your weekly training schedule to increase your overall training volume without creating a significant risk of overtraining.

Here are some suggested 20-minute workouts:

The Filler: Simply swim, ride, or run at an easy tempo for 20 minutes. This is a great workout to do when you want to avoid the guilt of doing nothing but you're not mentally or physically ready for anything challenging.

Tabata Intervals: Swim, ride, or run at an easy tempo for 16 minutes, then complete 8 x 20-second all-out sprints with 10-second passive recoveries between sprints.

Fartlek Intervals: Sprinkle 5 to 10 fast 30-second efforts throughout an otherwise moderate, steady-pace workout.

Threshold Session: Warm up for five minutes at a comfortable tempo, then go for 15 minutes at anaerobic threshold intensity (the fastest pace you could hold for one hour in a race).

Progression Workout: Swim, ride, or run for 15 minutes at a steady, moderate pace, then blast the last five minutes.

Time Trials:

- **Swimming**—Warm up, then swim 500 yards as fast as you can. Cool down as long as necessary to make the total workout 20 minutes.
- **Cycling**—Warm up, then ride 3 miles as fast as you can. Cool down as long as necessary to make the total workout 20 minutes.
- **Running**—Warm up, then run 1 mile as fast as you can. Cool down as long as necessary to make the total workout 20 minutes.

Triathlon Rules 101:

So you've made the decision to train and compete in a triathlon. You invested in the necessary gear and equipment, followed a sound training plan, and you've identified one or more triathlon events to compete in. It would also be wise to be mindful of the triathlon rules. Here's why...

In case you didn't know, USA Triathlon (USAT) is the sanctioning authority for most, if not all, triathlons you will participate in. There are rules. The USAT states that these rules are designed to "maintain consistency and order from race to race across the country."

You can download the triathlon rules at <https://www.teamusa.org/USA-Triathlon/About/Multisport/Competitive-Rules>, which include sections on membership, as well

as rules of conduct for swimming, cycling, running, and transition. There are also special sections on protests, hearings and appeals, and rules modifications for physically challenged athletes.

The USAT has identified the most common rules violations for which triathletes are most often disqualified or penalized. The rules violated and the subsequent penalties are as follows:

#1 Helmets

Only helmets approved by the US Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) may be used in USAT sanctioned events. Helmets must be worn at all times while on your bike. This means before, during, and after the event.

Penalty: Disqualification

#2 Chin Straps

Chin straps must remain buckled at all times when on a bicycle. You cannot unbuckle your chin strap, unless you are off your bicycle.

Penalty: Disqualification on the course; Variable time penalty in transition area only.

#3 Outside Assistance

Since triathlons are individual tests of fitness, no assistance other than that offered by race and medical officials may be used.

Penalty: Variable time penalty

#4 Transition Area

All equipment must be placed in the properly designated and individually assigned bike corral. Furthermore, the wheel of your bike must be down on the side of the assigned space. You must return your bike to an upright position in its designated bicycle corral. You cannot interfere with another participant's equipment or impede the progress of another participant. All bar ends must be solidly plugged (you have to have a cap on the end of your bicycle bars). And you cannot bring any glass containers into the transition area.

Penalty: Variable time penalty

#5 Drafting

You must keep at least 3 bike lengths of clear space between you and the cyclist in front. If you move into the zone, you must pass within 15 seconds. Always keep to the right hand side of the lane of travel unless passing; riding on the left side of the lane without passing anyone and interfering with other cyclists attempting to pass is not permitted. Once passed, you must immediately exit the draft zone from the rear before attempting to pass again.

Penalty: Variable time penalty

#6 Course

You must follow the prescribed course and stay within all coned lanes; cutting the course is an obvious violation and going outside the course is a safety issue. You cannot cross a solid yellow center line for any reason. You must obey all applicable traffic laws at all times.

Penalty: Referee's discretion

#7 Unsportsmanlike Conduct

These are forbidden: Foul, harsh, argumentative or abusive language or other unsportsmanlike conduct directed at race officials, USA Triathlon officials, volunteers, spectators or fellow athletes.

Penalty: Disqualification

#8 Headphones

Headphones, headsets, Walkman's, iPods, MP3 players, smartphone, and other types of personal audio devices are not to be carried or worn at any time during the race. You may have a phone on your bike in an enclosed pouch for emergency use, but it must not be visible or in use at any time during the race unless you are off the bike in an emergency situation.

Penalty: Variable time penalty

#9 Race numbers

You must wear a race number at all times during the run. Your number must face the front and be clearly visible at all times. Numbers may not be cut or folded or altered in any way. You also cannot transfer your number to any other athlete or take a number from an athlete who is not competing.

Penalty: Variable time penalty for missing or altered number, Disqualification and 1-year suspension from membership in USAT for transferring a number without the race director's permission.

#10 Wetsuits

You are permitted to wear a wetsuit without penalty in any event sanctioned by USA Triathlon up to and including a water temperature of 78 degrees Fahrenheit. When the water temperature is greater than 78 degrees, but less than 84 degrees, you may wear a wetsuit at your own discretion. However, if you wear a wetsuit within such temperature range, you will not be eligible for prizes or awards. Above 84 degrees, wetsuits are prohibited.

#11 Abandonment

All of your personal equipment and belongings taken out onto the course must stay on your person the entire time. No garbage, clothing, etc. is ever allowed to be thrown on the course.

Some races designate “drop zones” for shoes and other clothing, when you need to walk/run a distance before/after the swim, or when it’s really cold waiting to swim. Always ask during the pre-race meeting if it’s not clear in the event information and you think you’ll need to have shoes or clothing available outside transition.

Penalty: Variable time penalty

There are a few rules violations a newcomer might especially be prone to commit. Here are a few:

- You park your car blocks from the start line, so you hop on your bike to ride to the start. But your helmet is strapped to your backpack, which is strapped to your back. You are risking disqualification under the Helmet Rule.
- Listening to your iPod may sound like a great idea for managing the run. Unfortunately, that would violate the Headphone Rule.
- Let’s say you unhook your chin strap as you are rolling that last 10 feet before you enter the transition area. Oops—you just broke the Chin Strap Rule.
- Maybe a mile into the run you decide that extra layer you’re wearing is too hot. You pull off your top layer and toss it. You just violated the Abandonment Rule.
- Perhaps you are a relatively inexperienced cyclist and you try to pass someone just before you start going up a hill. Then you realize you can’t pass because you’re on a hill so you just stay on their left until the top of the hill. You most likely just violated the Drafting Rule.
- Something goes wrong in the transition area, and your sympathetic friend or significant other comes in to help you figure it out. That’s a no-no based on the No Outside Help rule.
- Your race number is flapping around and getting on your nerves. You yank it off, fold it up, and slip it under your tri shorts. That violates the Race Number Rule.

- During the swim, triathlete #128 tells you to get out of his way and kicks you hard in the face as he swims by. Later, you pass #128 on the bike and as you do, you have a few expletives to share loudly and you flip him off as you drop him going up the hill. If someone sees it, you've just disqualified yourself on the basis Unsportsmanlike Conduct.

So, the moral to the story is: be mindful of the official triathlon rules. By reading this post, you can knock ignorance off the list of things that would contribute to you getting disqualified. If you didn't already know, now you do.

[A common area of confusion for new Triathletes: Placement of Equipment.](#)

There is a triathlon rule which addresses how a participant sets up his bike and gear in transition. In races where an assigned spot is designated by race number, the gear and bicycle must be placed on the same side as the race number designation on the transition rack. The front or the rear wheel must be down on the same side as the number and the gear.

If transition spaces are not assigned, then wherever the participant racks, his gear must be located on the same side of the rack as the down wheel. The gear - shoes, run bib, etc., must be next to the wheel that is down and no gear should extend out into the alleyway between racks, nor should it interfere in any way with the adjacent participant's area.

USAT officials are available in the mornings of the race to advise participants if their gear and bike are racked legally.

Here's the rule:

7.2. Placement of Equipment.

All participants shall place equipment only in the properly designated and individually assigned bicycle corral and shall at all time keep their equipment confined to such properly designated areas. Any violation of this section shall result in a variable time penalty.

[Race Day Tips from A Sports Psychologist](#)

Dr. Mitchell Greene, located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, was the sport psychology consultant to the SheRox Triathlon series and the Philadelphia Insurance Triathlon. He is also a contributing columnist for USA Triathlon.

As a psychologist, I appreciated reading triathlete and author Terri Schneider's description of endurance sport racing as "one big mood swing." If your internal conversations on race day ever became public, I could probably have most of you committed for such extreme thinking! If you

read on, you will see that anticipating such radical mood shifts is one of several key tips I provide so that you can be prepared race day for anything that comes your way.

Here are my top 10 race day tips:

1. Stick to your race plan in terms of pacing. If you are thinking, “What race plan?” do not fret. Your plan may be to just finish the race comfortably. In that case, resist any urges when the gun goes off to keep up with faster women. It is much harder to slow down (once you are going too fast) than it is to speed up (if you are feeling good).
2. If you are feeling excess stress on race day, it is because you are trying to control the day’s outcome instead of letting it unfold naturally. As author Timothy Gallwey says, “the source of excellence is within,” yet “within” is often the last place we look for help.” Thus, if you find yourself seduced by chip times and age group rankings, notice the unnecessary tension you created. Then find that place within yourself where you are willing to give up all that control in order to get something more special – a chance to enjoy your sport, your friends, and the crisp morning air.
3. Focus on being relaxed rather than on exerting more power or effort. When I swim, I use a technique I learned in outdoor rock climbing which is to make my arms as light as possible (yet still sturdy enough) to do the job. This quickly helps remove the tension from my arms and shoulders, and with less effort I am more efficient in the water.
4. A great way to build confidence is to draft a mental blueprint of the course. Visualize yourself smoothly moving through tough sections, and see yourself taking advantage of easier sections of the course. With increased race planning, anxiety frequently lessens.
5. If you have a habit of being unkind to yourself, race day is probably the best day to give yourself a break. For a change, how about being as kind to yourself as you will be to others on race day? Remember, the only competition is really with yourself. In actuality, the derivation of the word compete comes from the Latin word *competere* which means “to seek together.” So, view the woman in the wetsuit next to you not as your competition but as your inspiration and motivation as you help each other strive towards achieving personal best.
6. Don’t overcompensate for anxious and negative thoughts by propping yourself up with overly positive affirmations. Center yourself and your emotions by having trust in your preparedness and persistence, and hold on to a quiet belief that you will succeed; but it’s okay to not be fully okay. A colleague of mine once said that too much positive self-talk to combat anxiety is like trying to throw yourself a surprise party. It doesn’t work.
7. On race day, find a zone inside of yourself, if you think it will be helpful, that allows you to feel and be less-than-perfect. For those perfectionists out there, consider the 90 percent

law: When athletes overly focus on feeling and giving 100 percent, they push for perfection which can paradoxically lead to more tension, and poorer performances than if they were more content to give 90 percent. Incorporating the 90 percent law into your triathlon mental game-plan can allow you (and your muscles) to be more relaxed, and may also help prevent self-defeating frustration and possible injury.

8. Concentrate on what you can control, such as your swimming, biking, and running form.
9. For example, noticing where your hand lands when entering and exiting the water, observing whether you are “scraping paint off the bottom of your shoe” while biking, and checking whether your shoulders are relaxed while running are race-related actions that can get you through tough stretches. These are aspects of the competition that you can control, and get you one stroke, one revolution, and one step closer to the finish line.
10. If you are tiring, set small achievable goals to motivate yourself to keep going. Even focusing on something just 20 feet in front of you can help you stay on track.

You have already won—now go play!!

Finding Your Purpose

Imagine it’s the morning after your first triathlon. Your tri bag has yet to be unpacked, and despite a long hot shower, in the mirror the faint outlines of age markings are still visible on your arm and calf. You awaken curious to see yesterday’s race results. Sitting at your kitchen table, you go on-line and find your name. Scanning the pages of results, you finally locate your swim, T1, bike, T2, run and final chip times. You take note of your age group ranking, and quickly peek at how close (or far away) you were from being first or last. Okay, now what?

Your race may be a long way off, but now is the time to consider what will leave you with a lasting feeling that this triathlon experience was a worthwhile endeavor and a personal success. Will split times determine your triumph, or are there other, broader ways to mark your achievement? For some, success is tied to goals such as meeting new people, reshaping your body, surviving the swim, not crashing your bike, never walking during the run, or simply . . . finishing. Clarifying your training and racing goals is a great way to sustain motivation and enhance focus, particularly when the going gets tough.

But, to help make your first triathlon truly an enduring positive experience, consider this time-honored advice: Some athletes get so caught up in trying to reach their goals that they confuse the purpose of participation with the goals of participation. In other words, they lose sight of the journey while becoming consumed by their destination. By purpose, I am referring to that inner sense of vitality, excitement, and connectedness you experience as you train your body to

perform at its best. It's that indestructible feeling you get when everything clicks during a tough workout, and includes the jittery excitement you may have felt when you finally registered for this race. You can't muster those feelings sitting and doing nothing on the couch, and ultimately I believe we do triathlons to have those experiences—to feel fully alive. That's why I ask the athletes I work with to “clarify their purpose” at the same time they set their racing goals. Some athletes post on their calendars, alongside their workout goals, reminders that signal their awareness that it's great just to be “in the game.” I want them to soak in all that they are learning—good and bad—as they move forward. My hope is that once you have finished your triathlon, have checked your results, and finally put your finisher's medal in your top drawer, you can continue to look back on this journey and regain a sense of being in the game and truly living life.