

TRIATHLON NEWBIE FAQ

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The joke goes:

Q: "How do you tell who is the triathlete in the room?"

A: "You don't have to; they'll tell YOU."

The joke is a nod to the stereotype that triathletes LOVE to talk about themselves, their training, their equipment, and their racing. If you're not familiar with triathlon, "that guy" (or girl) in the joke is often your reference point for "what it takes" to become a triathlete. You've probably heard that guy talk about his 20-hour training weeks, his \$4000 tri bike, his \$700 Ironman races, and all his training data and you've become overwhelmed; do you really need all that just to call yourself a triathlete?

The short answer is NO; triathlon should fit athletes of all shapes, sizes, and budgets. Here are a few FAQs for those of you hesitant about taking up the sport:

I don't have a bike, OR my bike is a piece-of-junk something-or-other that's been sitting in my garage for two years. Do I need an expensive carbon fiber race bike?

Short answer is no, you don't need a high-end race bike to complete your first triathlon. Many athletes complete their first race on a mountain bike, road bike, or hybrid that they already own (and even if it's been sitting in the garage for years, chances are we can get it road-worthy again for less than \$100 in repairs).

If you do decide to take the plunge and get a new bike for triathlon, an entry-level road bike can be had for as little as \$700. These bikes can do double-duty for commuting or weekend fun, and give you most of the performance gains you'd get from a much higher-end bike. Add a good bike fit and a pair of aerobars to a good entry-level road bike, and your bike will perform awfully close to many high-end setups.

I don't have 20 hours per week to commit to training.

Most people don't, and most of the people who say they do are exaggerating (when processing the training hours, average speeds, or personal bests of a triathlete, subtract about 1/3 from the number they're telling you to get the "real "answer).

You can do "enough" training to get through a short course race in as little as 4-6 hours per week. Obviously, the faster you want to go, the more you'll have to train, but most athletes can build the fitness/skills necessary to "just finish" off very little training.

OK, so I can train for my first triathlon on less than an hour of training per day. The question becomes: how do I make the best use of that relatively limited time?

A couple of strategies that triathletes use:

1. *“Brick” workouts*: these are workouts where you’re combining two different sports in succession. Not only do brick workouts replicate the demands of race day, they’re also more efficient for athletes who are pressed for time. A bike/run is the most common form of brick. Let’s say you want to do a 60-minute bike and a 20-minute run. Doing these separately would mean getting dressed for activity twice, setting up for two separate workouts, and cooling down/showering off after two separate workouts. Not only does a brick have training value, it often allows you to pile up training time more efficiently.

2. *Making it count with higher intensity*: for the past decade, one of the hottest topics in the exercise literature has been the efficacy of various forms of high-intensity interval training (or, as it’s commonly known, HIIT). The idea is that judicious use of higher-intensity training (say, a set of hard 5:00 segments on the bike) may provide more bang for your fitness buck than, say, noodling along for 40 minutes for your bike workout.

A well-designed training program will consider the amount of time available, an athlete’s background/goals, and will strike an appropriate balance between different intensities.

Great! What if I want to get started?

Here at Endorphin Fitness, we’ve helped hundreds of athletes finish their first triathlon, often off limited training. To that end, we’ve created our new “Triathlon Essentials” Program, designed to introduce new athletes to triathlon in a personalized, unintimidating atmosphere. We’re currently offering a free two-week trial of this program, and we hope you’ll check it out! E-mail dane@endorphinfitness.com or check out <http://www.endorphinfitness.com/endurance-coaching/essentials/> for more information!