

Eight Weeks to Your First Event

Considering competing in your first triathlon or multi-sport event? Read on for an eight-week training programme suitable for the first-timer.

STEP ON UP

Newcomers to multi-sport events encompass a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and athletic abilities. Nevertheless, whether you are an elite swimmer who has never run or cycled before or in your seventies and new to exercise, a planned training schedule is a key element for successful preparation. The 8-week programme discussed here should be adapted to your own individual circumstances (your existing fitness level, time available to train, etc) and the type of event you are entering (i.e., triathlon or multi-sport). Anyone can do this: the only assumptions are that you are healthy and willing to give it a go.

As you embark on your training, remember these basic considerations:

- Your training should improve overall fitness.
- You must allow time for regular commitments, such as family life and work.
- Avoid the signs of overtraining, as you risk overuse injuries or illness.
- Bear in mind any existing injuries when formulating your training plan
- Training should be fun.

CAN'T SWIM?

Before embarking on your programme, if you lack the basic skills for one of the disciplines (most often it is the swim or paddle section), seek help from a coach or competitor familiar with the type of

event you are considering. Embrace the challenge, and look on it as the first stage of your preparation.

TRAINING TIPS

As a novice, you should try and select a shorter event for your first one, and then gradually move up in distance if you wish to. Regarding equipment, stick to the basics at this stage of your participation. You don't want to have "all the gears and no ideas" as the saying goes. There will be time to explore high-tech equipment, and what it can do for you, as you gain experience. For now, concentrate on your fitness and technique, and on getting to the finish!

Once you have acquired the basic skills, you will need around 8 weeks to prepare for the event. The Table provides a basic training programme for a sprint distance triathlon (500- to 750-m swim, 20-km cycle, 5-km run) or similar

distance multi-sport event (replace swim with the paddle). One extra session has been included in the last few weeks leading up to the event, although this is not crucial and can be left out if you lack the time. During the last few weeks, any extra time should be applied to the weakest discipline — where gains will be most noticeable.

For triathlon, do at least 2 continuous, open water swims of 30 to 40 minutes in the last 4 weeks, preferably in a group and always taking safety precautions. Do the Saturday session in continuous fashion, to get used to the transition and its effects on your muscles.

As a novice, you should try and select a shorter event for your first one...

MORE IS NOT BETTER

Particularly if you are new to a sport, there is a natural tendency to want to improve as quickly as possible, and many see increased training intensity as a shortcut to improved performance.

John Hellemans' Training Tip

The key to enjoying your first event lies in pace judgement. If you can avoid the urge to go hard in the early stages and stay at your training pace, you will be able to finish the event feeling good and looking forward to the next one. However, I can guarantee that the majority, particularly males amongst the beginners, will be unable to follow this advice, get 'carried away' with the situation, and come to a grinding halt before the end. Especially if you have a competitive personality, be prepared for this!

Table. Triathlon training programme (times in minutes) for recreational/novice participant*

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Weeks 1 to 4							
Swim/paddle	20-30/30-60			20-30/30-60	Rest day		
Bike		30-45				30-60	
Run			20-30				20-30
Weeks 5 to 8							
Swim/paddle	30/45-60			30-40/45-60	Rest day	20/30	
Bike		45				30	60
Run	20		30-40			20	

* Notes: The cycling, kayaking, and running sessions are all at a continuous or easy steady pace. As this would be rather boring for the swim, break it into intervals, every second session. After a warm-up of 200 to 400 m, do intervals of anywhere between 2 and 10 minutes, e.g., 20 x 50, 10 x 100, 5 x 200, or ladders, e.g., 50 – 100 – 200 – 100 – 50, etc. Especially in the second 4 weeks, the intervals will be done at a steady pace and the rest between intervals can be shortened from 2 minutes to 1 minute.

Avoiding Overtraining: Simple Steps

- Check that your schedule has an 'easy' week after 2 to 3 hard training weeks. Have at least 1 day off each week. Increase the training load (intensity, volume or duration) by no more than 10% to 20% per 2- to 3-week training cycle.
- Deal with any injuries as they arise and do not try to train through them.
- Listen to your body — if you feel excessively tired, have an easy day or a day off. If you are training hard but performances seem to get worse, you are likely overtraining.
- Always warm up before a strenuous training session, and cool down actively afterwards.

If there is a classic mistake made by novice competitors (and many who are more experienced!), it is doing too much too soon in training. When you start training, stiffness in muscles lets you know you have overdone it. With time and adaptation to the training load, there may be almost no stiffness after a workout. Overtraining occurs when you continuously increase the training load without giving the body time to recover.

Jenny Rose's Training Tip – Starting Out for Women

I have found as an athlete and coach that women take longer to progress their fitness and weight loss than guys. You can almost be assured that after 3 to 4 weeks of consistent training, guys will be running and looking like gazelles! If only it was that easy for women! As a coach, I encourage women to run very regularly after the first couple of weeks of plodding. You will find that 4 short runs per week is far better than 2 longer runs per week. As a rule of thumb, I encourage 4 runs per week if you want to improve your fitness. However, if you really want to progress and start making big changes to your fitness, then 5 runs kick butt. Just remember that when you start running, you need to be nice to your body — don't torture it by running on hard pavement surfaces too often. Make sure that you get podiatry help and that you stretch after your runs. Self-massage can really relieve tight calves.

Kristina Anglem – First Event

ECNZ Tuatapere Wild Challenge 1996 – 30-km kayak, 30-km run, 10-km mountain bike

With a background in the outdoors, tramping, cycling, and kayaking, the progression to trying them all at once in an event seemed only natural. I chose the Tuatapere Wild Challenge because it was remote. We got a motor boat ferry to the start, and they had to helicopter our kayaks out — we reached civilisation only 5 km from the finish. My strongest memory is doing the 30-km kayak in my white water plastic 'reflex' kayak, with no idea about the high-tech boats available, or experience of using them. I came in last. In the run, I remember running through mud so deep and sticky, that I lost my shoe in a puddle, which I managed to find after diving in up to my shoulders. This race taught me that multi-sport is as much about beating the elements as it is about beating the other competitors, and that 'anything can happen'. After being last off the kayak, naive to what I could achieve, I battled against nature, had a blast being so challenged, and ended up coming in first.