

Triathlon Safety Tips

We have compiled some general safety information about participation in a triathlon. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but it highlights areas you should consider when participating. If you have any safety concerns, you should consult with a doctor, coach, event organiser, or Triathlon Manitoba.

Swim tips & safety

- Most triathlon swims take place in open water, which is more demanding than pool swimming. Practice in open water to get used to factors like cold temperatures, waves, currents, lack of lane lines to guide you, etc.
- Never train alone in open water or a pool, regardless of how good a swimmer you are.
- Avoid training outdoors if there is a possibility of a thunderstorm.
- Be aware of any obstacles.
- Make sure that if the water is cold, you take proper precautions, such as wearing a wetsuit and a swim cap. A wetsuit also increases buoyancy to help make the swim easier.
- If you're not a strong swimmer, during an event you should start toward the back to avoid getting kicked and elbowed by faster racers passing you.
- If you are feeling panicky, call for help, stop, or change strokes.
- If you get into trouble on the swim, put your hands in the air, or yell out (or both) to signal the lifeguard.
- If you get tired, turn over and backstroke (or another swim stroke), for a minute or so. Doing the breaststroke provides a good breather too, but don't do it around a lot of people.
- Unless you're a top swimmer, resist the temptation to go out hard amidst the starting-line excitement. You'll tire sooner, and your form will deteriorate quickly, making you go slower and use more energy.
- Often people do not like swimming after a large meal. Most find that if they eat within two hours of swimming, they feel bloated and do not enjoy that feeling.
- Don't chew gum or eat while swimming.

Cycling tips & safety

- Surface hazards are on every street, but are most common near the curb where most of the riding is done. Be prepared for and avoid:
 - sunken or raised manhole covers
 - potholes
 - speed bumps
 - stones
 - uneven pavement surfaces
 - any sharp object
 - slippery surfaces (mud, gravel, water) – go slower and turn carefully
- You must wear a certified helmet. Fit is important, and everybody's head is a different size and shape, so choose your helmet carefully. (TIP: If you have children that are riding, let them pick out their own helmet, so that they are more likely to wear it).
- Wear reflective patches on your clothing so that you can be easily seen at night.
- Never wear headphones when riding; it decreases your awareness of what's happening around you.
- Bike with the flow of traffic.
- Make sure your bike is in good working order.
- Riding in a straight line is one of the keys to riding safely in traffic. Learn this skill by following a painted line where there is no traffic. Also, try to eliminate upper body movement, as it wastes energy, and look straight ahead about 15 metres to keep in line.
- When practicing in traffic, be sure to use your hand signals.
- Shoulder checking is important to see what traffic behind you is doing. Practice shoulder checking in training while staying in a straight line.
- Safely pass others on the left (after looking behind you for traffic), and allow several feet of clearance -- riders in aero position, especially inexperienced ones, sometimes veer suddenly. Get several bike lengths ahead before returning to the far-right side of the lane so you don't cut off the person you've just passed.
- It is crucial to remember the draft zone. Please see the [Officiating & Race Rules](#) document for a detailed explanation and diagram.
- If you get a flat tire, gently slow down to a stop, and walk your bike to avoid ruining your tire and rim.
- Aerobars help you go faster, but sometimes the aero position is unsafe. Keep your hands near the brake levers (either on the brake hoods or the curved "drops" of your handlebar) for sharp corners, rough pavement, strong gusty wind, and any traffic condition that could require a quick stop.
- Don't ride in an aero position while training in a close group, unless you have drafting experience because you have less control of your bike's steering, and your hands are not close to your brake levers.
- When going out of or into the transition area keep your head up and stay in an easier gear as this is a hectic area, and others may be disoriented.
- Pre-clipped-in shoes and running mounts are both time-savers and potentially unsafe practices that must be practised and perfected before being used in a race.

Running tips & safety

- The running portion often takes place when the sun is beating down. Many triathletes suffer from heat stroke or dehydration. Be sure to wear a hat, and you may also want to wet your hat or clothing to keep cool. Use sunscreen to protect your skin.
- It is also important to stay hydrated. How do you drink from those aid-station cups while running? Crush the cup so it forms a narrow spout from which you can sip. If necessary, slow down or even walk briefly to make sure you can drink.
- Getting fatigued? Walk through the aid stations. This gives you a built-in break and ensures that you remember to hydrate. Take in energy drinks as well as water to avoid hyponatremia (low blood-sodium levels).
- Get a good, proper-fitting pair of running shoes to help prevent injuries.
- Lace locks or elastic laces on running shoes are popular time-savers during transitions if you are keen. Whatever you plan to use, practise before the event.
- Watch your arms. A huge mistake even among experienced runners is bad arm form. You want to keep your shoulders down, keep your arms relaxed, and avoid excessive arm movements, especially lateral ones. Additionally, your arms should be at approximately 90-degree angles. Don't clench your fists.
- Don't run your hardest every day. You shouldn't be out of breath and unable to move after every run. Recovery days prevent injuries, burnout, and make your running experiences more enjoyable.
- Run and walk against traffic in training.
- Practice running when it is hot outside because if you only train indoors or when it is cool outside, your body may not be able to cope with the heat on race day.
- Practice running immediately after biking because running after you bike is quite different from running without biking.

Tips for beginners

- If you are relatively new to physical activity, you should consult your doctor about your fitness routine and plans.
- Run your own race. Don't get off the bike and run at a pace 2 minutes faster than your usual pace because the person you finished the bike segment with is running at that pace. Remember, some people have been running for years before they ever did a triathlon. Don't get discouraged because you can't keep up with these people. Listen to your body and run at a pace that is comfortable for you.
- Pay attention to the pre-race meeting.
- Think/talk to yourself and others. Say positive things to other athletes. Remind yourself how far you have already gotten. This will allow you to keep going mentally, even when you are tired.
- Keep your head up. This will help keep the rest of your body in a line that will help prevent injuries. It will also allow you to run slightly faster.
- Join a triathlon club or a local running group. This is particularly useful if you don't enjoy running alone. Sometimes when you are in the middle of a good conversation, you will forget that you are running. In addition, you will gain tips and support by running with others.
- Carry sports drink during long rides or runs, and some way to carry it (a water bottle in a cage or waist holder or a hydration pack).
- If you are going to the race alone, have an "emergency" contact number with you.
- Know the rules of triathlon and follow them. Please see the [Officiating & Race Rules](#) document. You don't want to get disqualified or a time penalty after all your hard work and training. Common time penalties include drafting (following the cyclist in front of you too closely), blocking (riding on the left side of the traffic lane), and forgetting to buckle your helmet.
- Don't try anything new during the race or on race morning. You're best to stick with sports drinks, food, and equipment that you have used on a regular basis. Different people react differently to different things, so just because something works for someone else does not mean it will work for you.
- Learn more than one swim stroke. Good alternatives for open water swimming include sidestroke, breaststroke, and for some people, backstroke.
- How easily can you clip and unclip your helmet? Try it. Try it again when you have just run round the block and have wet hands.

Dehydration

- Dehydration is the most common cause of medical treatment following a triathlon, despite race organisers providing fluids during the cycle and run legs.
- Dehydration can seriously affect your physical and mental performance (even on cool days). A loss of 2% in body weight through sweating causes an increase in perceived effort, and is claimed to reduce performance by 10 to 20%. A 3 to 5% loss noticeably reduces aerobic performance and impairs reaction time, judgement, concentration and decision-making.
- Having access to a drink bottle during training, and carrying a drink bottle around during the day is key to ensuring athletes meet daily fluid losses.
- The average adult needs to consume approximately 2.5 litres of water per day. If you are exercising, you obviously need lots more!
- Athletes should aim to consume a minimum of 750ml of fluid each hour. The key is to keep hydrated. Many triathletes find it difficult to run and drink at the same time, therefore, the cycle provides a great opportunity to match sweat losses.

Heat Stress Facts

- Heat stress during exercise can affect anyone, regardless of age, fitness level, or body type.
- Exercise causes body fluid losses from moisture in exhaled air as well as from sweating. This causes a thickening of the blood, and places a strain on the cardiovascular system (heart and lungs) as the heart rate increases in order to maintain adequate blood flow to the exercising muscles and vital organs. Blood flow to the skin is reduced, and sweating then decreases which causes the body core temperature to rise.
- Heat illness progresses through a series of stages. Initially, athletes experience painful "heat cramps" (usually as a consequence of dehydration).
- These can be treated by escaping from the hot environment and ingesting fluids with an isotonic/hypotonic carbohydrate/electrolyte beverage (i.e., a sports drink). If the situation isn't addressed, heat exhaustion can develop.
- If heat exhaustion occurs, the athlete may cease to sweat. This leads to a rapid increase in core temperature, and will result in headache, nausea, dehydration, chills, dizziness, and in some cases, a loss of consciousness.
- Heat stroke is much more serious. Symptoms include a lack of sweat, headache, rapid pulse, altered mental state, confusion, lethargy, seizures, and even unconsciousness and a body temperature over 101°F / 38°C.
- If the body temperature isn't quickly lowered, heat stroke can be fatal. If you suspect someone is suffering from heat stroke, seek medical help and take immediate action to start lowering the body temperature. While you wait for an ambulance, help the person into the shade or to a cool place, wet their body or wrap them in a wet sheet to increase evaporation, and provide water.

Tips to prevent heat stress

- Gradually work your way up to several hours of exercise in the heat during your first few training sessions.
- To make sure that you are properly hydrated, weigh yourself before and after hard training sessions in the heat. If you finish a training session with a weight loss of more than 3 to 4 %, you should practice drinking more while on the bike.
- Wear a white or light-coloured jersey to reflect radiant heat as much as possible. Wear clothing made from "technical" materials that wick perspiration away from your body, and breathe very well.
- Do not use oil-based sunscreens, which impede sweating.
- When cycling, the wind moving across your body can remove body heat that is produced. Fluid replacement is more easily done during the cycle, so take advantage of the opportunity.

Tips for rain & cold weather

- Wetsuits are encouraged in cold temperatures.
- If the water is colder than you have ever practised swimming in, perhaps you shouldn't do the race.
- Cycling on open roads in cool temperatures, especially after a swim, can be very chilling. Uncovered hands/arms/legs will be very uncomfortable on the bike if it is windy or raining.
- On cool and/or rainy days, always bring extra layers of racing clothes, especially gloves, to the race. Arm warmers are also a good idea. If you don't need the extra clothing -- great, but at least you have it to keep you comfortable and warm if temperatures stay low, the wind is brisk, or it starts to rain.
- Running is a much warmer activity than cycling. On a cool day, it is perfectly logical to remove a layer of clothing during the bike/run transition.

Wetsuit Use

The use of wetsuits will be determined by the following:

- a) Elite athletes in ITU Olympic Distance Events and the Olympic Games:

Swim Length:	Forbidden above:	Mandatory below:	Maximum stay in water:
1500m	20 °C	14 °C	30 min

- b) Junior athletes at ITU Sprint distance events:

Swim Length:	Forbidden above:	Mandatory below:	Maximum stay in water:
750m	20 °C	14 °C	20 min

- b) For Age Group competitors:

Swim Length:	Forbidden above:	Mandatory below:	Maximum stay in water:	1500m & Under
22 °C	14 °C	1 h 10 min		
1501-3000m	23 °C	15 °C	1 h 40 min	
3000-4000m	24 °C	16 °C	2 h 15 min	

The use of wetsuits will always be recommended for age groups athletes at events sprint distance or longer.