



Your first triathlon

You have entered the race, done the training – well, some of it, and the day is approaching fast. What do you need to remember for your first tri?

In the days before, ensure that you are well hydrated by drinking plenty of water and isotonic drinks.

The night before, check all your kit is ready. Make sure you have tried it all out beforehand – a race is not the time to try out new trainers, clothes or sports drink.

Some of the things you need to remember will be:

Essential:	Desirable:
Bike	Tools/Spares
Helmet	Pump
Drinks Bottle	Number Belts
Shoes for cycling/running	Glasses
Tri Suit / Swim wear / Shirt / Shorts	Sports Bag
Wetsuit	Safety Pins
Goggles	Energy Gel
BTF Card (If Member)	Food Bars
	Watch
	Towel
	Track Suit
	Spare Goggles
	Talcum Powder For Shoes
	Rubber Lubricant
	Socks
	Toilet roll (Just in case!)

When you have checked everything, check it all again – you will have forgotten something. Plan an early-ish night as 17 pints of bitter and a curry is not considered good preparation for an event.

On the day of the race, make sure you have worked out your nutrition and hydration. Either eat a complex carbohydrate based breakfast i.e. porridge or wholemeal toast or energy bars for breakfast. Most of the isotonic drink companies give advice about how many bars to eat before a race and how much fluid to drink. The longer the race the more vital fluid is, but on a hot day, even a short race can cause dehydration problems.

As this is your first triathlon, you need a goal to aim for. This depends on your fitness level, but I would suggest your goal should be just to enjoy yourself and finish in one piece. Once you have done one triathlon, you can then change your goals.

It is a good idea to check out the race site beforehand, if you have the chance.

On the day, arrive at the event a **minimum** of one hour early, especially if you have not been to the site before. Register and rack your bike in the transition, then join the queue to the loos.

Spend the time familiarising yourself with the site. Start with the swim section. Have a look at the course and the buoys where you turn. Check the number of laps and go through the swim in your head. If you can, walk round outside of the swim course to check your sighting. When you are swimming, it is often difficult to see the buoys, but if you have noticed a landmark behind the buoys, you just aim for that instead. For example, at Salford Quays, there are various cranes and buildings to aim for and sighting the buoys is not that important until you are ready for the turns.

In a swimming baths event, watch the other swimmers to check the instructions. The marshals won't necessarily count your lengths so devise a system of counting that works for you. If you think up a foolproof one, patent it and you will make a fortune.

Walk from the water exit back to transition, as if you are finishing the swim and locate your bike. Repeat until you are certain you can find your bike without problem. Check where the bike exit is and walk from the bike entrance back to your bike racking position. Repeat. Then look for the run exit.

Never underestimate your capacity for basic errors in transition when you are wound up, tired and in a hurry. Make sure you are happy with the location of bike racking location, and then join the queues to the loos again.

You can always leave a brightly coloured towel or a plastic bag over your bike to help you find it – but balloons are not permitted.

Obviously, if there are 2 transitions, as in the Boundary Breeze race, you check each one.

If you can have a quick look at the start of the bike course, then do so and make sure your bike is in the correct gear for you.

Have a look at the run course, too, to get an idea of what the terrain is like.

With about 30 minutes to go, join the queues for the loos for the last time (by the way, this is not compulsory – there isn't a marshal checking up on you!) and enter transition to arrange your equipment. Hopefully, you won't have forgotten where your bike is by this time.

Lift out all your swim equipment and lay out your cycle shoes/trainers and helmet/glasses at the side of your bike, together with a towel and any extra clothing you may need on the bike. If you are wearing a trisuit, then you shouldn't need any extra clothing. In case you were planning something different, nudity is not allowed in transition.

It is your choice on what clothing you fasten the race numbers. If you have an expensive trisuit, you may wish to use an elasticated number belt to attach the numbers to, to save making holes in the fabric. If you are using a running top for cycling and running, then pin the numbers to your top. Normally two numbers are required, one at the front and one at the back. Don't cut, fold or hide the numbers, unless you want to be disqualified!

Put on your wetsuit, but if it is warm, you may prefer to leave your arms out until a few minutes before the start. Rub rubber water soluble lubrication on your calves to help when taking off your wetsuit in a hurry. Now walk down to the start, with your goggles and swim hat that you collected at registration (and timing chip, if applicable).

If you get the chance, go in the water early to acclimatise yourself.

You will be given instructions by the starter and you will be ready for the off. If you are a strong swimmer go to the front, if you are a weaker swimmer, I would recommend that you start at the back or side, even swimming a longer distance, if need be.

When the hooter sounds in a massed start, it is chaos. I would start your swim slowly to get used to the feeling of being in a race. Don't rush off a pace you can't maintain just because other swimmers are faster. Ignore them and go at your own pace.

I say ignore other swimmers, but this is not always possible! If you are in the front line, you will find swimmers bumping into you, swimming over you, under you and across you. This stage is mercifully brief as the swimmers soon stretch out into a line and you get into your rhythm.

After counting your laps, exit the water, but be prepared to feel a little light headed when you start to run toward transition, but this passes quickly. Unzip your wetsuit as you run, to save time in transition. Whilst you are running, think of what you are going to do in transition.

As you will have remembered where your bike is racked, you will go straight to it won't you??

Take off your wetsuit and put on whatever you need for the bike leg. I suggest you work out an order of putting on any clothing, shoes, then helmet and glasses. **ONLY WHEN YOU HAVE PUT ON YOUR HELMET, UNRACK YOUR BIKE.** You will get a time penalty if you unrack your bike without wearing a helmet.

Run (hobble if wearing cycling shoes with cleats) to the exit. Another time penalty if you ride your bike in transition. The marshal will show you the line that indicates you are out of transition and you mount the bike and away you go.

Don't forget that most races do not close the roads, so white van man is still around. Take care!

When you are about 2km from the end, change down a gear or so to spin more. The theory is that it improves the circulation in your legs and prepares them for the run stage.

When you arrive at the entrance, a marshal will tell you to dismount and you run with your bike to your racking space. **DO NOT REMOVE YOUR HELMET UNTIL YOU HAVE RACKED THE BIKE.**

Now put on your running shoes and stagger towards the exit. To start with your legs will feel like bricks. Run with short strides until the effect wears off. At this stage you will be thinking 'why on earth am I doing this?' If you have been doing brick training the effect will be lessened as your body and brain will have become accustomed to the feeling. For those who haven't been listening, brick training is going for a bike ride then immediately afterwards going for a run – a short one would be sufficient - to get used to the 'after bike legs feeling'.

Now it is a matter of plodding (or sprinting, if you can!) round the course to the finish. Remember – you will be tired and it is very easy to miscount your laps. Again, you will be thinking 'Why am I doing this??'

The finish appears like an oasis and suddenly you will have finished your first triathlon!

I guarantee that within 5 minutes, despite what you were thinking on the run, you will be planning your next race. You will be hooked!

Return to transition to collect your belongings, but take care! Other competitors will still be racing and it is easy in your euphoria of finishing to get in the way of other people – who will not be impressed!

A final word about the marshals. They are all volunteers, usually triathletes and their friends, who give up their day to make the race successful for everyone. Don't give them a hard time – in fact, remember to thank them. It is a long day for them and it makes it more worthwhile if they feel to be appreciated.

Your club will run a triathlon, so why not volunteer to act as a marshal yourself?