

Women's guide to triathlon – running

Running is something we've all done at one time or another, whether you're just starting out or have many seasons of triathlon under your belt. You learn to walk during your earliest years and you're running soon after that. So, unlike cycling or swimming, it's a basic skill we all learn from a very early age.

The run is the easiest triathlon discipline to prepare for, as it requires the least amount of effort to undertake. You don't have to travel to a pool or battle to find a free lane and you don't have to worry about punctures, traffic and riding on slippery roads in poor conditions. You can run in just about all weathers and it's as easy as stepping out your front door.

That said, everyone is different and some people will find running easier than others. But with the right knowledge, tools and advice you'll be able to produce your best triathlon run ever, whether you're a beginner or have been in the game for years.

Safety

There are a couple of serious issues concerning your training that, as a woman, you have to take into consideration more seriously than men – your safety being the principal one.

There's nothing better than running alone through some beautiful parkland on a bright, sunny morning but what happens on dark nights when you still need to get out and train? Triathlon and/or running clubs are really useful at times like this, as you'll get to meet up with other like-minded people to go running with. The benefit of training with others, apart from it being safer, is that it will inevitably improve your running. You'll be less likely to plod around at the same pace, a trap people often fall into when they train alone.

If you don't have any option but to train on your own, take precautions. If you do have to run alone always run in places you're familiar with. If you're lucky enough to have woods and trails near you, try and run at times of the days when you know other people will be out too. And don't always run in the same place at the same time.

This may all sound a bit too serious, but it's something you should consider as a female runner. The name of the game is to enjoy your running – be as free as possible but avoid putting yourself in a vulnerable situation.

Diet

There are a few things to take into consideration when you're trying to fit hard training around the other things in your hectic life. Depending on your age, it's important to keep an eye on your iron intake. So make sure you're consuming plenty of iron-rich food. You'll become tired and lethargic, and your training will suffer if your iron levels deplete too much. Plenty of calcium and fish oils are also important to keep your bones and joints strong.

Footwear

Clothing and footwear aren't as straightforward as you might think. Finding the correct shoes is definitely rule number one. The wrong shoes can cause numerous problems including blisters and injuries. Sometimes injuries are unavoidable but, with the right shoes, many are preventable.

Find a good sports shop. These days most specialist running stores have a treadmill where your biomechanics can be checked to make sure you're running in the right shoe to suit your needs. Beware: running shoes don't last forever. Keep an eye on the tread on the bottom of the shoe. Once it starts to look worn, it's definitely time for a new pair. This also helps ensure you don't develop any unnecessary injuries.

Socks are also very important. You'll find that different types suit different people. Make sure you find the right ones for you because this will help prevent blisters. Depending on how quick you want your transitions to be when you're racing, you may decide not to wear socks. Obviously, if you want to be as quick as possible you won't want to spend time putting socks on. If this is the case, make sure you rub a little Vaseline on the inside of your heel and anywhere else you think your shoes may rub.

Support and comfort

The main issue to take into consideration when choosing your run clothing is comfort, so rule number two is find a good sports bra. There's nothing worse than not having good support in this department. You might want to 'double up' for added support but be careful not to wear something too tight around your chest as this can restrict your breathing.

Although there's still room for improvement in sports bra design there are more and more options available, so have a good look around until you find something that fits you well. Make sure the rest of your clothes fit well. Never under- or over-dress as being too hot or cold will affect your performance.

Training

Everyone has different views on what's right and wrong but there are a few main principals that we can follow which will keep you on the right track. Joining a club can help you in several different ways. You'll find that most go od triathlon and running clubs also have a coach and there'll be organised sessions such as track sessions or long group runs.

Treadmills can come in very handy in the winter when the days are short and the weather is bad. You can do some great hard interval sessions on them and, because there's a lot less impact, the aches and pains are a lot less the following day. Less impact means there's less muscle damage.

However you choose to train there are some general principles to follow. Start out steadily but progressively. Remember: if you do too much before your body is prepared, you may end up injured. Always include a long run in your weekly schedule because this will help your stamina and endurance. Build it up slowly. Start with a long run – maybe 40mins – and add 10mins a week, which is a manageable amount. In five weeks' time you should comfortably be doing a ?1:30hr run.



You need to get used to running off the bike, so it's important to practise this in training. Even if it's just 10mins at the end of a ride, it'll help you practise your transitions. Alternatively, if you do spin sessions at the gym, hop on the treadmill after your workout.

Throughout the winter there are always many opportunities to do some cross-country races or road races. You'll find that age or sex isn't a problem at most races and there'll always be someone to run with as levels of fitness and speed vary enormously. Racing for fun during your off-season will help keep your mind and body in tune with racing, and come the start of the triathlon season you'll be ready and raring to go.