



ACSM Information On...

YOUTH TRIATHLONS

Triathlons, consisting of swimming, biking, and running has seen an increase in participation with youth athletes. Prior to competing, youth athletes should acquire the skills and fitness necessary to swim, bike, and run in a safe manner. As the youth athlete matures they can increase their fitness levels and continue to successfully participate.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

A well-rounded physical activity program includes aerobic exercise and strength training exercise, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness and overall health and function. Regular physical activity will provide more health benefits than sporadic, high intensity workouts, so choose exercises you are likely to enjoy and that you can incorporate into your schedule.

ACSM's physical activity recommendations for healthy adults, updated in 2011, recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) five days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are:

- Walking
- Running
- Stair climbing
- Cycling
- Rowing
- Cross-country skiing
- Swimming

In addition, strength training should be performed a minimum of two days each week, with 8-12 repetitions of 8-10 different exercises that target all major muscle groups. This type of training can be accomplished using body weight, resistance bands, free weights, medicine balls or weight machines.

Youth Triathlons

Youth triathlons (swimming, biking, and running) have greatly increased in popularity. Prior to entering an event the athlete should acquire the necessary skills and fitness.

Distances

Triathlon distances may vary depending on the event.

Ages	Category	Swim*	Bike	Run
7-8	Youth	50 to 100 (pool)	2k	1k
9-10	Youth	100 (pool)	3k	1k
11-12	Youth	200 (pool)	5k to 7k	2k
13-15	Youth	200 to 400	8k to 10k	2k to 3k

*Distance in meters

Prior Training

The young triathlete should be in good health and should be able to swim at least one length of the pool, and have a bike that is in good working condition. They should be able to ride the bike with confidence and the bike should fit appropriately. The triathlete should be able to run/walk a minimum of a half mile.

Recommended Equipment

The minimal mandatory equipment is swimsuit, bike, bike helmet, and running shoes. Experienced triathletes generally have the following: swim cap, swim goggles, towel, bike pump, sun screen, hat, T-shirt, water bottle, fluid, etc. While all items are not mandatory they may prove to be useful during training or competition.

Bike helmets must be worn with the chin strap buckled before moving or getting on the bike, and cannot be removed or unbuckled until the bike is placed in a designated transition area.

When selecting a bike, check with a good cycle shop or get advice from an experienced cyclist. Consider the athletes' age, size, cycling ability, and experience. The bicycle tires should be properly inflated prior to training or competition.

At the Event

Prior to an event, the athlete picks up their packet, and has their body marked with a number and age designation. Get to the event early (45 minutes to an hour), and listen to and follow safety and event instructions.

In hot environments hydrate every 10 to 15 minutes with water or an electrolyte beverage. Young athletes tend to have greater heat stress complications as compared to adults.

The triathlete should practice transitioning from one event to another, and be familiar with bike location in the transition area. The triathlete must be prepared to transition to the proper clothing and equipment for the event. No outside assistance is allowed, other than what is provided by medical or race officials. Parents are not generally allowed in the transition area. Events should have adults in the transition area and on the course to assist with problems.

Training

Most young triathletes can perform a triathlon with a basic level of fitness and training. The training should be devoted to a combination of swimming, cycling, and running. As ages and distances increase so does the need for fitness and skill. Enjoyment should be emphasized. Track and field sports, swim, cycling, or triathlon clubs can provide good instructional venues.

For the Parent or Coach

Compared to adults, young triathletes are not as psychologically mature. They need motivation and positive support during preparation. Adults should be cautioned to make the activity a fun activity. For most youth triathletes the event is a family event.

Triathlons should be fun without undue pressure from parents regarding performance times. Overtraining can cause injuries, decreases in performance, and burn-out.

Young triathletes are not just little adults. They have a number of special needs and considerations.

Children or adolescents can safely participate in triathlons provided they receive proper instruction and supervision. Basic exercise guidelines and considerations for youth should be followed.

When frequency, intensity, or duration is increased, do so progressively. Young triathletes are susceptible to overuse injuries. To avoid a soft tissue or bone related overuse injury, children should alternate the exercise modality with type and intensity. This will help provide 'active rest' to the muscles that were used during exercise training sessions. Rest is important for tissues to repair and recover between training days.

As the musculoskeletal system grows quickly during adolescence, it is important that youth keep good exercise form to avoid injury. Check the bike fitting every 6 months to a year to prevent back and knee injuries. Running form should be monitored.

Brochure content provided by Henry N. Williford, FACSM, Professor, Department Head Physical Education and Exercise Science, Auburn University Montgomery

Ages 7 to 8

The primary goal is to have fun and be able to complete the event safely. The training activities can consist of doing different strokes or drills in the pool (swimming under water, kicking, working on different strokes, treading water, using flotation devices, etc.). Running could be playing games (tag, ball games, Frisbee, etc.). Cycling could be riding around the block, riding with friends or parents. This age group has a lot of enthusiasm with little experience. Work on safety and developing skills before endurance. Youth are especially susceptible to heat stress. Make sure they are slowly acclimated to the heat and are well hydrated. They should always be supervised by an adult. Concentrate on fun, fitness, friends, and skills.

Ages 9 to 10

The goal is to have fun, fitness, friends, and work on skills. The activities can consist of doing different strokes or drills in the pool. This age group needs more work on their swim stroke mechanics and motor skills. Running should consist of aerobic conditioning as well as games. Cycling will be more demanding, and biking with parents and friends is appropriate.

Ages 11 to 15

The goal is to be able to complete the event in a reasonable amount of time. The distances are longer and may be similar to what you might see in an adult short sprint triathlon. Work on swimming skills, endurance, and mechanics. If the event is in open water, the triathlete should have training regarding open water swimming. The run requires a good pacing strategy. Cycling is more demanding in terms of being able to bike longer distances. Triathletes should be reminded to take in fluids during both cycling and running.

Summary

The American Academy of Pediatrics and USA Triathlon (USAT) indicate that triathlons for youth are reasonably safe as long as the events are modified to be age appropriate. Careful attention should be given to safety and environmental conditions. A triathlon can be potentially dangerous and adult supervision is very important. The focus of multisport competition should be on developing lifetime skills and fitness.

Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity – such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking – significantly contributes to longevity. Even a person with risk factors like high blood pressure, diabetes or even a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can help you stay on a diet and lose weight. What's more – regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones.

The First Step

Before you begin an exercise program, take a fitness test, or substantially increase your level of activity, make sure to answer the following questions. This physical activity readiness questionnaire (PAR-Q) will help determine if you're ready to begin an exercise routine or program.

- Has your doctor ever said that you have a heart condition or that you should participate in physical activity only as recommended by a doctor?
- Do you feel pain in your chest during physical activity?
- In the past month, have you had chest pain when you were not doing physical activity?
- Do you lose your balance from dizziness? Do you ever lose consciousness?
- Do you have a bone or joint problem that could be made worse by a change in your physical activity?
- Is your doctor currently prescribing drugs for your blood pressure or a heart condition?
- Do you know of any reason you should not participate in physical activity?

If you answered yes to one or more questions, if you are over 40 years of age and have recently been inactive, or if you are concerned about your health, consult a physician before taking a fitness test or substantially increasing your physical activity. If you answered no to each question, then it's likely that you can safely begin exercising.

Prior to Exercise

Prior to beginning any exercise program, including the activities depicted in this brochure, individuals should seek medical evaluation and clearance to engage in activity. Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone, and some programs may result in injury. Activities should be carried out at a pace that is comfortable for the user. Users should discontinue participation in any exercise activity that causes pain or discomfort. In such event, medical consultation should be immediately obtained.



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