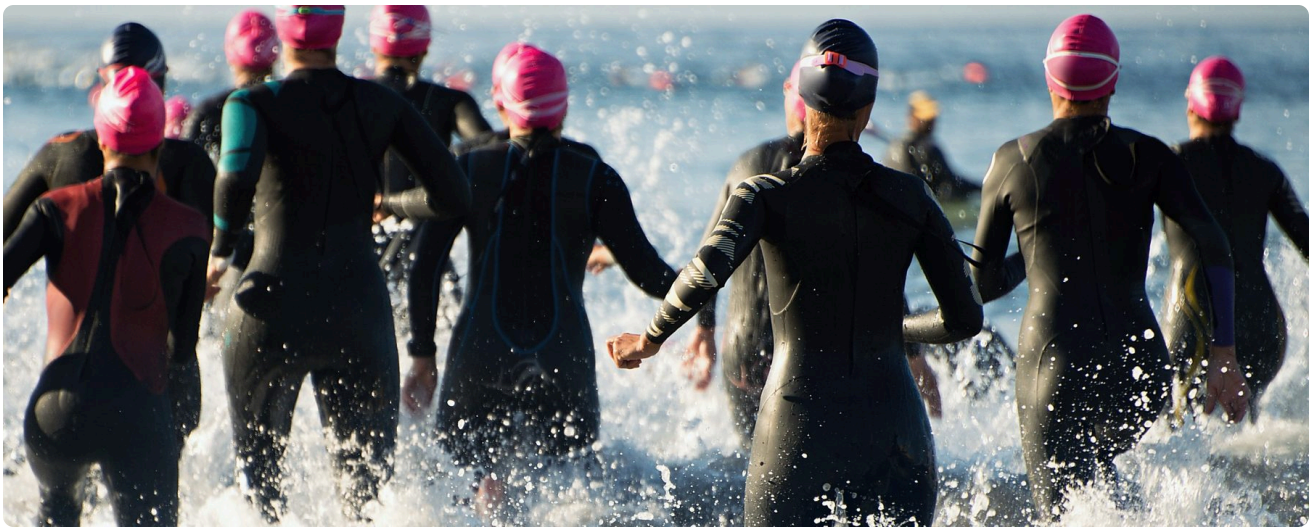
Plan: your first sprint triathlon

Last reviewed: October 17, 2026



Train for 12 weeks with two swims, two rides and two runs a week, one of the rides finishing with a short run. Build each sport gradually, ease off in the last two weeks, and practice open-water swimming safely before race day.

Why it matters: A sprint triathlon is usually about a 750-meter (½-mile) swim, a 20-kilometer (12.4-mile) bike ride and a 5-kilometer (3.1-mile) run. Distances vary by race, so check yours. Spreading training across three sports lets you build fitness with less pounding than running alone.

Who it suits

- People who can swim 4 lengths of a 25-yard pool without stopping, ride a bike for 30 minutes, and run or run-walk for 20 minutes.
- Can't swim continuously yet? Take adult swim lessons first. Swimming is the part of a triathlon you can't walk through.

What it costs

Item	Commitment
Training	6 sessions a week, 20 to 70 minutes each
Strength	1 or 2 sessions a week, about 40 to 45 minutes; 1 during the taper
Total time	About 4 to 6 hours a week at the peak, including strength
Equipment	Swimsuit and goggles; a road-worthy bike and helmet; running shoes. A wetsuit if your race water is cold
Difficulty	Beginner

How the sessions work

- **Easy:** you can talk in full sentences, or breathe comfortably while swimming (see "Endurance training basics").
- **Swims:** mix continuous swimming with short rests at the wall. As you improve, swim longer stretches without stopping.
- **Bike-then-run workout:** a bike ride followed straight away by a short run, so you get used to running on tired legs. Triathletes call this a "brick."
- **Race effort:** the effort you plan to hold in the race.
- **Sample week:** Monday swim, Tuesday run, Wednesday bike, Thursday swim, Friday run, Saturday bike-then-run, Sunday rest.

The 12-week plan

All times are in minutes.

Week	Swims (each of 2)	Midweek ride	Runs (each of 2)	Saturday bike-then-run
1	20	30	20 (run-walk is fine)	Ride 30
2	20	33	22	Ride 33
3	25	36	24	Ride 25 + run 10
4 (easier)	20	30	20	Ride 30
5	25	40	26	Ride 30 + run 10
6	30	44	28	Ride 35 + run 12
7	30	48	30	Ride 40 + run 15
8 (easier)	25	40	25	Ride 30 + run 10
9	35	52, with 3 × 5 min at race effort	30	Ride 45 + run 15
10 (peak)	35	55, with 3 × 6 min at race effort	33	Ride 50 + run 18
11 (taper)	25	40	25	Ride 30 + run 10
12 (race week)	20, one swim only	30 easy with a few short pickups (20 to 30 seconds a little faster than race pace, not all-out)	20, one run only	Race

Building gradually: each run grows by no more than about 10% over your recent longest. The research behind that rule comes from runners (see "Running injuries"); the plan applies the same caution to swims and rides.

Strength, once or twice a week

Heavy lifting makes running and cycling more efficient (see "Strength training for endurance athletes"). For swimming, a 2017 review found that low-volume, heavy or fast lifting carried over best, though the evidence is limited; the lat pull-down works the same muscles as your

stroke. If the week feels full, once a week still counts. Plan my workouts puts these sessions on your strength days.

Weeks	How often	What to do
1 to 4 (learn the lifts)	Once or twice a week	Squat jumps first, landing in place: 3 × 5. Leg press and dumbbell Romanian deadlift: 2 × 10 to 12. Barbell split squat, light: 2 × 8 to 10 on each leg. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 2 × 10 to 12. Single-leg calf raise: 2 × 10 to 12 on each leg. Suitcase carry: 2 × 30 to 45 seconds on each side. Use weights you could lift a few more times.
5 to 10 (heavy)	Once or twice a week	Jumps first, with full rest: box jumps 3 × 5 in weeks 5 to 7, then broad jumps 3 × 5 and single-leg hop and stick 2 × 4 on each leg in weeks 8 to 10. Leg press and barbell Romanian deadlift: 3 × 4 to 6, heavy, with a rep or two to spare. Barbell split squat: 2 × 6 to 8 on each leg. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 3 × 6 to 8. Single-leg calf raise: 3 × 8 to 12 on each leg. Suitcase carry: 2 × 30 to 45 seconds on each side, heavier over time.
11 (taper)	Once a week	Leg press and Romanian deadlift: 2 × 4 to 6 at the same weight. Lat pull-down and dumbbell bench press: 2 × 6 to 8. Single-leg calf raise: 2 × 8 to 12 on each leg. Leave out the jumps.
12 (race week)	None	Rest from strength.

- **Put heavy leg days** two or more days before the long session and away from hard sessions where you can.
- **Squat instead of the leg press** once you know the lift (see "Learning a new lift").
- **Jumps follow** the beginner progression in "Plyometrics: jumps and throws": land quietly, and move on only when landings are controlled.
- **Upper body too:** a pull and a push each session keep your whole body strong, as "How much exercise is enough?" recommends.

Open-water safety

- **Practice in open water** at least two or three times before race day, only where there's a lifeguard or with a buddy in a kayak.
- **Never swim alone** in open water.
- **Practice in your wetsuit** if you'll wear one.
- **In the race,** start at the back or side of your group, and roll onto your back to rest if you need to. Raise an arm for help.

Transitions

- Set out your gear in the order you'll use it: helmet and bike shoes, then running shoes and race number.
- Practice the swim-to-bike and bike-to-run changes during your bike-then-run workouts.
- Helmet on and buckled before you touch your bike.

Fueling and drinking

- A sprint race usually lasts 1 to 2 hours. Eat a familiar breakfast 1 to 4 hours before the start (see "Fueling for endurance events").
- Carry a bottle on the bike and drink to thirst (see "Hydration, sodium and race day").
- If you'll race longer than about 90 minutes, practice taking an energy gel (a small packet of quick carbohydrate) or sports drink on the bike during your bike-then-run workouts.

After the race

- Take a few easy days.
- Next goal: an Olympic-distance triathlon, which roughly doubles each leg.

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