

Triathlon Transition Tips

Whether you are doing your first triathlon or racing to win, your main goals in the transition area is the same: *you want to do as few tasks as possible and make each task as simple as it can be*. If you've ever watched a triathlon, you've probably seen some triathletes who hardly seem to come to a stop in the transition area and others who get bogged down with enough tasks to keep them busy for at least a couple minutes. Since the clock doesn't stop running while you switch from one race segment to the next, shaving a minute off your transition split is as valuable to your overall time and placing as shaving a minute off your split time for any of the three disciplines (and probably a lot easier to do). By practicing the tips below, you can easily save yourself some time in the transition area on race day. More importantly, by simplifying the tasks you need to complete between each portion of the race, you will be able to enjoy the event more.

Transition Tip #1: Keeping it Simple. While you'll obviously need to make some equipment changes, the fewer things you need to change, the better. For example, it can be very time consuming to put cycling shorts, running shorts, or a singlet onto your wet body. There are many styles of triathlon suits available, most of which consist of bottoms that are basically biking shorts with a minimal pad (so it won't get soggy in the water) and a snug-fitting top that you can swim in without creating much extra drag. Since you can complete the whole race in a triathlon suit, it eliminates the time and hassle of having to change pieces of clothing in the transition area. Also, put your sunscreen on before the race, not during it. And finally, avoid doing anything in the transition area that you could do on the bike, such as drinking and eating. While moving along at full speed on the bike, you can leisurely drink and fuel instead of having to scarf them down while standing still in the transition area.

Transition Tip #2: Pre-Race Transition Area Set-Up. There are a few essential items to have at your transition area: a brightly-colored towel (to mark your spot, put your shoes on, and wipe your feet on, if necessary), your bike, your bike helmet, a pair of sunglasses, and your running and biking shoes (and a race number belt, if you won't be using a wetsuit). Your water bottle and any food you plan to eat during the race should already be on your bike before you go down to the swim start, and your bag (and anything else you brought with you to the race) should be tucked away somewhere out of the way. If the racks are tall enough, hang your bike by the seat (instead of the handlebars) because it will keep you from having to back it up to get it off the rack, which could cause the chain to fall off. Next, place your towel on the ground next to your bike and place your shoes on it with their laces (or Velcro) loosened ("lace locks", which you can get at any running store, will save you the time and hassle of tying your running shoes). Your helmet can usually be placed upside-down, with the untangled straps hanging over each side, on your handlebars (especially if you have aerobars), but if not, put it on your towel. Open your sunglasses and place them in your helmet, and, if you'll be using a race number belt, drape it over the aerobars so you won't forget to put it on before starting the bike ride. Many advanced triathletes start with their bike shoes clipped into their pedals, but if it's not something you are used to doing, place your bike shoes on the towel with your running shoes. Before you leave for the swim start, make sure you know where you'll be entering and leaving the transition area, and make a mental note of how to find your spot quickly from those entrances.

Transition Tip #3: The Wetsuit. A wetsuit will keep you warm in the water and also usually helps you swim faster too. However, many triathletes struggle with getting their wetsuits off. By using the following technique, you'll be able to get out of your wetsuit quickly and easily every time: Spray PAM on your body before putting wetsuit on. Then, once you get your wetsuit completely on your body, smear some Crisco shortening or spray PAM on the outside of the suit over your shins, calves, and forearms. Apply BodyGlide to potential rubbing spots. Do NOT use Vaseline because petroleum-based products are harmful to neoprene (the stuff your wetsuit is made of). Since touching the inside of your goggles with Crisco-coated fingers is a sure way to make them foggy, use a rubber glove or sandwich baggie to apply it to the wetsuit (and avoid touching your goggles afterwards). As soon as you exit the water, you can reach back, unzip your wetsuit, and pull it down to your waist. When you get to your spot in the transition area, pull the wetsuit down to your knees (or lower, if possible), grab a hold of the rack (so you don't fall), and quickly lift each foot out of the suit while stepping on it with the other foot. Toss your wetsuit under your rack and out of the way before putting on your cycling shoes, sunglasses, and helmet (and race number belt, if you didn't wear it under your wetsuit). After the race, you can easily wash the Crisco off the wetsuit with some dish soap and water.

Transition Tip #4: Running With Your Bike. When running in the transition area with your bike, hold it with one hand so you don't have to hunch over the whole time. You can grab it by the stem, and it's a good idea to practice a little before race day so you don't have any unexpected problems. Most races will have a "dismount line", so make sure you know where it is so you don't accidentally get on your bike before crossing it or ride over it upon your return.

Transition Tip #5: Bike to Run. It can be a little more difficult to find your spot in the transition area when your bike is no longer there, so make sure you know where to find it. Once you hang your bike (by either the seat or handlebars), you can take off your helmet and cycling shoes, quickly slip on your running shoes, and leave for the run. It should be simple and easy, especially if you've practiced it a few times beforehand and set up your transition area as described above.

Triathlon Gear Check-List

SWIM

2 pairs of Goggles (one tinted; one clear)
Wetsuit
Extra bathing cap (wear beneath race cap for warmth)
Bathing suit or Padded Brief or Tri-Suit
BodyGlide / Sports lube

BIKE

(fuel on the bike for your run!)
Bike & Helmet
Bike Shoes
Water Bottle(s)
Sunglasses for Bike
Energy drink with sodium/electrolytes
Bike Jersey / Singlet / Bike Shorts
Bike gloves and socks (personal preference)
Spare tube / Pump or CO2 / Tire irons / Tool Kit
GU / Cliff Shot / Power Gel
2 towels for transition area (one brightly colored towel to mark your "turf" and one towel on which to lay out your gear)
Extra water bottle for transition area
Energy bars

RUN

Running Shoes
Sunglasses
Socks
GU / Cliff Shot / Power Gel
Visor or Hat (personal preference)
Race belt (to carry gu/gel packs if preferred)

GENERAL

Gear bag to carry everything
Sunscreen that is waterproof & sweat-proof
Flip-flops / Sandals / Shoes
Shorts / Pants
Sunglasses
Band-aids / Blister block
Chapstick / Blistex
USA-T Card & Photo ID