



Triathlon: the best workout ever?

We meet three women who've taken up the sport and are enjoying the benefits of this fantastic all-round workout. Plus, get started with our exclusive sprint-distance training plan

WORDS: Joanna Ebsworth



**'I'm more
toned than
ever!'**

CAROLINE SELVON, 26

**EVENTS AND SPONSORSHIP
EXECUTIVE FROM LONDON**

'I've always been sporty, but it was my job that inspired me to enter a triathlon. I work for a company that organises triathlon events so I've seen the benefits people get from competing. Plus, my boyfriend is a triathlete and lots of my colleagues do triathlons, so you could say I was starting to feel left out!

'My first triathlon is in May and I'm doing the 400m swim, 25K bike and 8K run distance, which I think is achievable for a first timer. I cycle to work and back every day so my cycling is quite strong, and my running's okay. But it's the swimming that absolutely petrifies me – I only learnt to swim recently because of the triathlon.

'I went to Lanzarote after Christmas and tried open-water swimming for the first time. It's very different to being in a pool, especially because you're wearing a wetsuit and you can't stop or stand up to have a rest. I haven't experienced swimming in close proximity to other people yet, and that's another fear I'll have to conquer for the race. I've heard stories from others about getting kicked in the face in the mass starts, so I'm nervous, but I know I'll get so much out of it. Not only do I get to compete in a race and feel great about it, but I also get to do all the training in the lead up.

'I feel fitter and more toned than I ever have before and I look much better too. I weigh the same because I've put muscle on, but my arms especially have shaped up from swimming. I've never



**'I know that if
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get even better'**

done any training that has so specifically worked my arms before, so I've noticed a big difference. The training has boosted my confidence too

and I'm feeling fantastic. I know if I continue to train and do more events, my figure will get even better.

'To anyone out there who thinks doing a triathlon is too hard or too big a commitment, that's exactly what I thought. But I decided to go for it and I think it's achievable for anyone, big or small, old or young. You'll get big rewards too – you'll look and feel better than ever and your confidence will soar.' ➤



'Triathlon has transformed my life after serious illness'

CAROLYN HEWETT, 32

**PRODUCT MANAGER
FROM LONDON**

'In 2004, I became very ill with viral meningitis and had to be looked after by my parents. A year later, I was still seeing a doctor every three weeks because I was sleeping 16 hours a day and couldn't walk 100 metres. When I was diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), the doctors said I had to accept I'd never recover from it and that this was how my life was always going to be. Of course, there were floods of tears – I felt I was living a nightmare.

'I went back to work but I had no social life – I'd come back from work then go to bed. One day, I decided I didn't want to live like that anymore, so I went for a 20-minute run/walk. It put me in bed for a week but a month later, I ran/walked for 20 minutes and was only in bed for four days, which was an improvement! Eventually, I was running three times a week, and although I'd be tired, exercising gave me strength. I set myself a goal of doing a marathon in 2006 and I managed to do it in four hours although I was in bed for a week afterwards. It

was so emotional for me because it was exactly one year to the day that I'd been told I had CFS.

'It was then I decided to sign up for a triathlon. I bought a wetsuit on ebay and an old bike, and I couldn't tell you what my time was for that first event, but I loved it and got completely bitten by the tri bug. After another one, I signed up for my first Ironman triathlon in 2007, which involved a 3.8k swim, 180k bike and a full marathon. Being the crazy lady I am, I decided to try and win my 25–29 age category for a place in the World Championships held in Kona, Hawaii – which I did by 22 minutes. I can't tell you how it felt to go up and accept my trophy, my World Champs place and be told I'd broken the course record, especially when I could barely walk a few years before. It was the most phenomenal feeling ever.

'Since then, I've done more Ironmans around the world but I mainly stick to Olympic and sprint distances now to give me more time to spend with my boyfriend. I'd encourage any women to sign up for a triathlon – you get to be incredibly fit and enjoy a great social life because everyone's so friendly, and for me, they've helped me not to be sick anymore. Doing triathlons really has transformed my life.'

PHOTOGRAPHY: Will Ireland. HAIR & MAKE-UP: Malin Coleman. Carolinne wears: Sweaty Betty All Sport bra, £25; Asics Top Impact Line Women's Core Balance tights, £80; Asics GEL-TRAIL ATTACK 6 shoes, £70 (www.asics.co.uk). Carolyn wears: Tigirl tri suit, £89 (www.tigirl.co.uk); Specialized Women's BG Tahoe MTB shoes, £64.99 (www.specialized.com). Beverley wears: Shock Absorber wetsuit, £40.50 (www.shockabsorber.co.uk/swim)

'Triathlons helped me face my fears'

BEVERLEY TURNER, 36

**WRITER, BROADCASTER AND
MOTHER OF TWO FROM LONDON**

'I like to exercise, but I've found when you're juggling kids and work, exercise can seem like a luxury indulgence unless you have a reason to train. Signing up for an event gave me the focus I needed to train regularly, and I found people are much more supportive in helping you find time to exercise.

'My first son was two and a half when I signed up for the WomenOnly Triathlon, and it seemed like the perfect way to shape up my post-baby figure. I chose to do a triathlon rather than a running event because I swam competitively until I was 17, so I knew I could do that part of the race. However, I'm useless on a bike and get really nervous about falling off, so I had to be really brave about the cycling. But

having the opportunity to achieve something big definitely helped me face my fears.

'I love the results you get from the cross-training triathlon requires, because you get to use all the muscles in your body, whereas I find if I only swim, I get big shoulders, or my thighs bulk up if I'm only running. I lost weight and really toned up from the training, and I noticed I could pick up my son more easily and had more energy to play with him. I definitely felt more energised. You get a bit of a smug glow about you because you know you're making the effort to train hard.

'I've done four triathlons in total, all at a sprint or super-sprint distance, and I'd definitely do another. I still make mistakes in my transitions but there's a lot to think about – it's hard getting a wetsuit off and putting on your shoes and helmet against the clock. But then I'm not competitive about triathlons – I'm just doing them for the experience, and the sense of satisfaction you get at the end of the day once you've completed one. You can't beat the Shock Absorber WomenOnly Triathlon for getting that feel-good factor [see opposite for how to enter]. Seeing other women of all ages running, swimming and cycling together is so inspiring. Most of them are working full-time, raising families, juggling their lives and still finding the time to train – I found that emotional, all these women pushing their bodies, working hard and achieving goals.'



Now *you* tri!

If your fitness has reached a plateau and you're not getting the results you want, why not sign up for your first triathlon? As the UK's fastest growing sport, triathlon involves swimming, cycling and running, to give you a full-body workout that challenges every muscle in your body and takes your fitness to new heights. And with more women-only races than ever before, plus distances to suit everyone from complete beginners to super-fit athletes, there's never been a better time to get involved.

'Lots of women have this idea that triathlons are really extreme and masculine,' says Andrea Whitcombe, triathlon coach at thetrilife.com. 'Don't get me wrong, they're challenging – which is part of the attraction in the first place. But when you break the event down, most people have some experience of running, swimming and cycling – the hard bit is putting them all together. On the bright side, it's this combination of doing three different sports that helps you keep your training varied and stay motivated.'

Since triathlon became an Olympic sport in 2000, the number of women getting involved has increased dramatically – and it's not just because you can burn up to 1,000 calories in one sprint distance (750m swim, 20km bike ride and 5km run) race. 'One of the most attractive things about triathlon is that it's very sociable and you get the chance to meet lots of people through training and doing events,' says Whitcombe. 'You can join individual swimming, running and cycling clubs to perfect your technique, as well as a local triathlon club, which you can find at www.britishtriathlon.org.'

The fact you only compete against your age group has also encouraged women of all ages to take up triathlon by removing the fear of embarrassment you'll be left for dust by a whippet-fast 18-year-old. 'I didn't take up triathlon until I was 30, and it was great to experience the thrill of competition again and get that amazing sense of achievement,' explains Whitcombe. 'People are picking up triathlon all the time so it doesn't matter what age you are, and the chances are you'll meet similar people to you.'

Of course, the best thing about triathlon is you get to develop your all-round fitness. You can say goodbye to bingo wings with your pool sessions, hello to a fab bottom and legs with the cycling and running, and your core strength will get a great workout too. If you're on the larger side and prefer to

avoid high-impact sports, triathlon could be perfect for you as you can burn lots of calories and build your fitness up gradually with the cycling and swimming without putting too much strain on your lungs and joints until you're more physically prepared to run.

Training for a triathlon doesn't mean you'll be saying 'so long' to your social life either. 'If you're a beginner, getting in one session of each sport per week is a great start,' says Whitcombe. 'Ideally, as you get fitter, you'll start combining two of the disciplines into one, otherwise know as a "brick" session, ie, cycling home from work and then heading straight out for a run. This way, you could get six training sessions into just three days.'

Once you've found a suitable triathlon to enter, you'll need to get some experience of swimming in your wetsuit, because it changes your body position in the water. Your local pool may allow this if you ask permission first, or if you're lucky enough to live near an outdoor pool, it's an ideal place to have a go. You can find venues for open-water swimming at www.openwaterswim.co.uk. Many triathlon events also offer training days that include open-water swimming practice.

THE FOURTH DISCIPLINE

In order to clock a speedy time, you need to work on your transitions (changing from one discipline to another). You could join a triathlon club or train with a coach from a company such as thetrilife.com, but practising in your garden can also help. 'Focus on getting out of your wetsuit, putting on your shoes and helmet, running to your bike and swinging your leg over and off your bike,' advises Whitcombe.

Finally, perfecting your technique in the disciplines can make a big difference to your time. Find a swimming coach to help hone your front crawl, or get help learning how to use the bike gears effectively and you'll soon be on your way to crossing the finish line in a faster time. ■



TOP TRI KIT

This extremely light Specialized S-WORKS helmet, £129.99, is women-specific and has maximum ventilation to keep you cool; www.specialized.com.

Aqua Sphere's Ironman WRacer wetsuit, £329.99, is cut to fit the female form and is very lightweight and buoyant, plus it comes with a mat to use in transition; 01254 692200.

These new Kayenne Lady goggles by Aqua Sphere, £17.99, are a compact size and offer good peripheral vision. Choose clear or tinted lenses; see www.aquasphereswim.co.uk.

Trek's women-specific 7.6 FX WSD bike, £875, has the slim tyres of a road bike and upright riding posture of hybrid bikes – perfect for beginners; www.trekbikes.com.

Trigirl's highly flattering Yvonne Trisuit, £109, features a removable bra top and a zip pocket at the back; www.trigirl.co.uk.

ASICS' GEL-NOOSA TRI 5 trainers, £90, can be worn sockless to speed up transitions and have special tongues and heel tabs which give grip when your hands are wet; www.asics.com.

JOIN US AT THE SHOCK ABSORBER WOMENONLY TRIATHLON!

H&F is media partner for this exciting event on Saturday July 3, 2010 at Dorney Lake in Eton. Come and be a part of the largest women-only triathlon in the UK, soaking up the friendly, non-intimidating environment of the Human Race event. We'll see you there!

Choose from four challenges:

Novice: 200m swim, 5km bike, 2.5km run (£55). **Sprint:** 400m swim, 20km bike, 5km run (£60). **Challenge:** 800m swim, 30km bike, 7.5km run (£66). **Relay Challenge** (2–3 people): 800m swim, 30km bike, 7.5km run (£85). To enter, see www.humanrace.co.uk.



YOUR TRIATHLON TRAINING PLAN

Feeling inspired by our readers' stories? This 10-week training plan has been created exclusively for *H&F* by Andrea Whitcombe, triathlon coach with *thetrilife.com*.

This beginner's sprint-distance programme is for women who have 3.5–5.5 hours a week to train. You should be fairly active already and able to swim four lengths front crawl without

stopping before starting this plan – if not, build yourself up slowly until you're ready to start. If you have questions about the plan, e-mail the coaches at askacoach@thetrilife.com.

WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
TRAINING TIP	In each session, include five minutes of warm-up with gentle activity before you start harder efforts. Keep the intensity low to begin with – you should be able to talk while you're training.						
1	SWIM 30 minutes. Repeats of two lengths with 30-second rests in between.	BIKE 30 minutes. Spin class, gym bike, turbo trainer or out on your bike! OR Do a session in your weakest discipline.	RUN 30 minutes. Repeats of four minutes' jogging; two minutes' walking.	SWIM 30 minutes. Repeats of three lengths with a 30-second rest.	DAY OFF	RUN 30 minutes. Repeats of five minutes' jogging; one minute walking.	BIKE 60 minutes. Maintain a cadence of 90rpm (rotations per minute) – check this on a gym bike.
TRAINING TIP	Get to know your bike. Use the smaller chain ring when riding up a hill and the larger chain ring on the flat.						
2	SWIM 35 minutes. Repeats of two lengths with 25-second rests.	BIKE 35 minutes. Include five sets of two minutes of harder effort with two minutes easy to recover.	RUN 30 minutes. Repeats of 10 minutes' jog; one minute walk. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	SWIM 35 minutes. Swim repeats of four lengths with a 30-second rest.	DAY OFF	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course. Count your strides and aim for 90 right-foot strikes per minute.	BIKE One hour 15 minutes. Choose a nice, rolling course. Use all your gears.
TRAINING TIP	Be as long and streamlined in the water as possible when you swim. Count the number of strokes you take per length and try to reduce this by one every two weeks.						
3	SWIM 40 minutes. Repeats of four lengths with 20-second rests.	BIKE 45 minutes. Include five sets of two minutes of harder effort with one minute easy to recover.	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course.	SWIM 45 minutes. Repeats of six lengths with 30-second rests. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	DAY OFF	RUN 35 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course.	BIKE One hour 30 minutes. Find hills to build strength and practise using your gears.
TRAINING TIP	You'll soon need to practise swimming in open water. Find a training day in your area.						
4	DAY OFF	BIKE 45 minutes. Keep your pedalling rate or cadence between 85rpm and 95rpm.	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course.	SWIM 30 minutes. Repeats of four lengths with 20-second rests.	DAY OFF	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course.	BIKE One hour. Keep up a cadence of 90–100rpm when you're on the small chain ring.
TRAINING TIP	Practise drinking on the bike! You need to be well hydrated in all disciplines in your training as well as your race.						
5	SWIM 40 minutes. Swim repeats of four lengths with 15-second rests.	BIKE 50 minutes. Include five sets of three minutes' harder effort with two minutes' easy to recover. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	RUN 35 minutes. Choose a rolling course. Warm up with a 15-minute easy run, then do three sets of three minutes' easy, two minutes' steady, one minute fast, then go easy.	SWIM 45 minutes. Swim repeats of eight lengths with 30 seconds' rest.	DAY OFF	RUN 40 minutes on a rolling course. Count your strides. Aim for 90 right-foot strides per minute.	BIKE One hour 30 minutes. Choose a hilly course and include two climbs to build strength.
TRAINING TIP	What are you going to eat and drink on race day? Practise before the race.						
6	SWIM 45 minutes. Repeats of eight lengths with 15-second rests.	BIKE 60 minutes. Include five sets of three minutes' harder effort with one minute easy to recover.	RUN 40 minutes. Choose a rolling course. Warm up with a 15-minute easy run, then do four sets of three minutes' easy, two minutes' steady, one minute fast, then go easy. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	SWIM 45 minutes. Swim one set of 16 lengths with a 45-second rest, then one set of 12 lengths same rest, then eight, then four. Then swim repeats of four lengths with 30 seconds' rest.	DAY OFF	RUN 40 minutes. Choose a rolling course. Aim for 90 right-foot strides per minute.	BIKE One hour 45 minutes. Choose a hilly course and include three climbs to build strength.
TRAINING TIP	Include race-pace efforts in one session of each discipline. Swim repeats as two easy, one harder.						
7	SWIM 45 minutes. Swim repeats of eight lengths with 15-second rests.	RUN 45 minutes on a rolling course. Warm up for 10 minutes with an easy run, then do five sets of three minutes' easy, two minutes' steady, one minute fast; then go easy.	BIKE 60 minutes. Include five sets of three minutes' harder effort with 30 seconds' easy to recover.	RUN 40 minutes. Choose a rolling course. Aim for 90 right-foot strides per minute. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	DAY OFF	OPEN WATER SWIM 30 minutes. Practise sighting the course markers – raise your head just enough to see every eight strokes.	BRICK BIKE Bike for one hour 15 minutes, then run for 11 minutes straight after. Run out for six minutes and back in five minutes.
TRAINING TIP	Start thinking about your kit for the day – have you got everything you need? Get it now so you can train in it. No new trainers on race day! This is a recovery week – a massage would help.						
8	DAY OFF	BIKE 45 minutes. Keep your cadence between 85rpm and 95rpm.	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy rolling course.	SWIM 45 minutes. Swim repeats of eight lengths with 30-second rests.	DAY OFF	RUN 30 minutes. Choose an easy, rolling course.	BIKE One hour 30 minutes. Choose a nice, rolling course. Use the small and large chain rings.
TRAINING TIP	Make time to practise the transition from swim to bike (T1) and bike to run (T2).						
9	SWIM 45 minutes. One set of 16 lengths with a 45-second rest, then one set of 12 lengths with same rest, then eight, then four. Then swim repeats of four lengths with 30-second rests.	RUN 35 minutes. An easy run over a rolling course. OR Repeat a session in your weakest discipline.	BIKE 60 minutes. Include five sets of three minutes of harder effort with 30 seconds' easy effort to recover.	BIKE 60 minutes. Include five sets of three minutes of harder effort with 30 seconds' easy to recover.	DAY OFF	OPEN WATER SWIM 30 minutes. Practise some deep-water starts and include five repeats of 30 hard strokes and 20 easy strokes.	BRICK BIKE One hour 30 minutes, then run for 15 minutes straight after – run out for eight minutes and back in seven minutes.
TRAINING TIP	You're ready. Now relax. Prepare your kit and check your bike and equipment.						
10	DAY OFF	BIKE 40 minutes. Keep effort light but include three sets of one minute at race pace with at least five minutes recovery in between.	RUN 30 minutes. Easy effort, but include three sets of two minutes at race pace with five minutes recovery in between.	SWIM 30 minutes. Swim repeats of four lengths with one minute rest.	PREPARE FOR THE RACE. Pack your kit and put it in the car. Visualise the race in your head.	RACE DAY GOOD LUCK! Stretch well after the race.	Keep active to assist recovery.