

Triathlon on a Time Budget

by: Liz Newbery



Somehow in our busy busy lives, the things that often seem to go most easily by the wayside are those things we do for our own wellbeing. While enjoying life and feeling good shouldn't be luxuries, time constraints do provide a very real barrier to living an active healthy lifestyle. After surveying local triathletes and marathoners, I've created a compilation of tips for fitting triathlon into a busy life. I hope you find them useful.

1. Make training a part of a lifestyle

Some people set their own work agendas, while others live highly scheduled lives. For both of these scenarios, the most important thing is to make triathlon and training part of your lifestyle - something as automatic as brushing your teeth, washing the dishes or talking with friends. Try getting out your day book and writing down your training sessions like any other appointment. You wouldn't skip your dentist appointment because you have to grocery shop, so why skip a scheduled training session? If you make plans to meet someone else to bike or run with, you will be even less likely to "miss your appointment." Committing to meeting training partners goes a long way towards committing to making time for training.

2. Find ways that training can replace routine daily activities

Training sessions can become social events. Instead of getting together over a beer and a game of pool, gather with friends over a bike ride, run or hike. In the summer months, I try to do all of my errands on a bicycle, and haul groceries in my panniers. I sometimes ride my bike to meet friends for running workouts - this turns the workout into a brick workout of sorts, without adding extra time. In fact, while living in Toronto I found that bicycle commuting was the only exercise I needed, and was faster than driving or the TTC. Walking or running to errands are also effective. All of those little ways that we choose self propelled transportation over mechanical transportation are highly beneficial, both environmentally and physically. Stairs over escalators and elevators, bicycles over cars, walking over the bus - while these activities can't necessarily replace focused training sessions, they certainly help with toning and general fitness.

3. Find the optimal time of day for you to train

Many people find it easiest to fit training in in the mornings. They get up and work out before showering and heading off to work (thus avoiding having to shower twice in one day for those compulsive morning showerers). Some people find it easier to exercise in the evening when the brain is too tired to work, but the body can still move. Some go to work ½ hour early, run over a long lunch, and then eat at their desks. Sometimes a half hour run in the middle of the afternoon, when energy is dragging, provides a mental wake up and makes post-run work much more productive. Whatever your rhythm, the trick is to manage time so that training adds to your day instead of draining time and energy.

Short workouts tend to provide energy, and wake the body up. Long training sessions, like once a week endurance runs or bike rides, can leave the body too fatigued for difficult physical or intellectual work for the rest of the day. I typically fall asleep at my computer and have very unproductive work days after long runs. I've heard two creative solutions to this problem. One is to do long training sessions in the evening so the body can recover while sleeping and you wake up refreshed. The other is to fit 3 hour runs or bike rides in on weekday mornings by getting up at 5:00 am. You may be tired all day at work, but as one friend puts it, your fatigue will ruin a weekday, rather than a more prized weekend. Proper nutrition and good stretching immediately after a long training session seems to ward off some of the fatigue. I've also heard of people cooling muscles down immediately after hard workouts by swimming, hosing off, or using ice packs.

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4. Strategize balancing training with child care

The best strategy, if at all possible, is to make your kids part of your training. If they are young, they can be carried or wheeled along. If they are older, they might want to ride their bikes beside you as you run. Maybe make them part of your training by having them time you. Take kids hiking. Take them swimming with you; some pools have family swims the same time as length swims, so while they go up and down the water slide, you go up and down the length of the pool. Maybe your kids want to get involved in triathlon themselves. Kids of Steel have a range of races for almost all ages - so instead of doing child care, you will have found a new training partner. I knew one woman who brought her kids to the track, and set them down in the middle of it with toys and bikes while she did her speed workout - she was able to run and supervise simultaneously. Pilates or stationary biking can be done in the backyard where your kids are playing. Some women and men trade babysitting; each person gets one morning a week with all the kids, and one morning a week to train. They do the same workout and compare notes as an extra motivator.

5. Let go of some things

Finding time to prioritize training may require re-prioritizing other activities. Maybe think about reducing the number of gourmet meals a week, and plan cooking so that you can eat leftovers more frequently. Or think about the amount of time spent getting ready for work in the morning, the delegation of household tasks, or allowing laundry to build up. What do you do in a week that is less important to you than fitness? Whatever it is, find a way to decrease the amount of time doing it in order to make more time for you.