

SALLY EDWARDS

TRIATHLONS

4TH EDITION

for women



Training Plans • Equipment Advice • How-to Info

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Get Inspired

As I reached the turnaround point on the 112-mile bike leg of Ironman Japan, I saw a banner stretched above the road, the only English banner among the hundreds the Japanese had placed along the route. On it were three short words that struck me with the force of a thousand. The power in the brevity of this statement has had a lasting impact on me: *Do your best!*

As a woman in triathlon, this is what I race for and this is what I want for you, regardless of your finish time or place.

Completing your first triathlon is a great goal, and one that can lead you to a whole new idea of yourself. I have seen thousands of women make their way to the finish line of a triathlon—an accomplishment they never would have considered possible before they started training. Finishing is winning, and along the way you will also gain fitness and pride in yourself and your achievement. Your goals will get you there.

Before we get to work on your personal goals, consider three questions that will begin to bring into focus what competing in this event will bring to you. Some common responses are also provided.



Do your best!

Why do you want to do a triathlon?*I want to get back into shape.**It gives me motivation to reach for a goal.**My friends are training for it.**I want to lose some fat/weight.***What obstacles do you expect to face?***I don't know how.**I am scared and I might not finish.**I've never done anything like this before.**I don't have time to add one more activity to my lifestyle.***What will motivate you to complete your first triathlon?***I love to be outdoors.**I find new challenges exciting.**I need to exercise because I know that it is good for me to do so.***THINKING WEIGHT LOSS?**

Many women begin training for their first sprint-distance triathlon because they want to lose weight and get in shape. If you can identify with this goal, I would encourage you not to focus on the negative idea of losing weight, but on the positive one of gaining fitness. We all need to begin our training with a goal that holds meaning for us and connects our hearts to our performance. Losing weight is a goal, but isn't it better to set your sights on something you can gain, rather than on something you can lose?

If you are not training for your first triathlon—but your fifth, or your tenth—you may still share some of the sentiments mentioned above. You may have ambitions of improving your performance or tackling a longer triathlon for the first time. From your perspective as a more experienced triathlete, consider some possible responses to similar questions:

Why are you training for triathlons this season?*I am more motivated to train regularly with a race on the calendar.*

*I finished my last race thinking I could do more.
I want to build more strength.*



What obstacles do you expect to face?

*Training will be harder this time around.
I am worried that I might not make my goal time.
I've never finished a swim, bike, or run leg of this distance.
I don't have much free time in my schedule for more training.*



What will motivate you to compete at a higher level than in your first triathlon?

*I found a training partner or training group with similar goals.
I want to achieve a faster or longer race before my next birthday.
I purchased a plane ticket to a destination race.*

TRAIN, DON'T EXERCISE

When you head out the door for a run or bike ride, do you think of it as exercise or training? There's a big difference between the two. It is the motivation behind the activity that separates those who train from those who exercise.

Someone who exercises does it usually for the purpose of getting or staying in shape. A person who trains has a greater goal in mind, a dream. Whether you want to enter a race, beat a nemesis, learn more about yourself, meet new friends, or expand your horizons, what counts is that you set goals and accomplish them. In my playbook, athletes define their goals and then train to achieve them.

A woman who is new to running might train with the goal of competing in her first 5-km race. An Ironwoman trains with the goal of testing everything she has in the most grueling one-day race around. Exercise is part of training, but it isn't the only part or even the most important part. If you identify your goals, you will have a greater purpose to drive you out the door to train even when you don't feel like it.

MAKING YOUR GOALS PERSONAL

The best goals are aligned with our values, those things on which we are willing to spend our resources—time, effort, money. You can identify

values in all areas of your life, and these priorities change over time. They motivate you, direct your focus, and define how you feel when you are done. Start from the heart, taking responsibility for where you are right now. Take some time to identify, clarify, and prioritize your values. For example, for some women, family and relationships are at the top of the list. For others, work, appearance, or intellectual pursuits are important. What is important to you? What makes you feel good about yourself? Are there changes you need to make in your life to better align your choices (how you spend your time and resources) with your values?

Next, consider why you do what you do when it comes to your athletic pursuits. In short, why are you training? Maybe you have a family and little fitness, and you want to do something for yourself and your health. Or maybe you've hit a fitness plateau and really want to accomplish more. What is it that you hope to accomplish through multisport? Write down your top three goals when it comes to triathlon and what it means in the big picture for your life.

I encourage you to do this exercise now. Don't wait until later to identify the three things you hope to get from training. This is an important step in defining your goals.

Once your goal comes into focus, keep the big picture in mind. The things you are training for are large goals, and there are many smaller goals that will help you achieve them along the way. As we get into the training chapter, you'll find that the microcycles of training target these smaller goals.

Here are some examples of specific goals that you can set as markers en route to your larger goal:

To get back into shape and stay in shape so I can do my best.

To finish a run that is at least three-quarters of the race distance four weeks prior to the event.

To beat the clock—the time I have planned on finishing the race.

To help my friend get through training and finish the race.

To finish with a joyful smile on my face.

Although the smaller goals are important, I firmly believe the large goal is what you need to fix your thoughts on. It's like having an elephant in your garden, trampling your violets. You could work on completing a small goal—protecting your violets—by fencing the flowers off with

chicken wire. However, since elephants aren't chickens, that probably won't work very well. What would work better is to focus on the bigger picture—getting rid of the elephant—by calling your local animal rescue program. Give your attention to the elephants in your life and your violets will grow beautifully.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Because there's more at stake when you decide to train, not exercise, I can promise you that obstacles will happen. If there's anything to be learned from Chapter 1, it's this: Women are strong, and we've achieved athletic feats that our grandmothers never had the opportunity to dream of. If you need more convincing, let's take a look at what I know are the biggest obstacles most women face. In each case, there is motivation to be found, and a clarity of purpose that will prove very rewarding.

Available Time

If you think about it, you have this in common with a professional athlete: the same twenty-four hours in a day. The difference is that a professional has too much time for training and consequently faces the threat of over-training. For you, on the other hand, time is probably scarce. You might compensate by cutting corners (sleep or meals with family) to get in your workouts. But these sacrifices will come at a cost.

Think of it this way. If a workday consists of eight hours, this means you have the equivalent of three full eight-hour workdays in each twenty-four-hour period. If you spend one of these segments at work, and you sleep for another segment, you still have one bonus segment—the equivalent of one full workday—left to use as you wish—and this is where you can fit in your training and other activities.

Training for triathlons truly requires that you learn to deal with time. You will have to juggle the time demands of training schedules, sleep requirements, good nutrition, professional work, your family, and, finally, your own personal growth, in a day that contains only twenty-four hours. Perhaps you've come to the conclusion that you simply cannot accomplish as much as you would like to in one day. Ask yourself whether this conclusion is justified. Is it possible that there is some time in your day that is wasted? Are the things that you hope to accomplish in a day in line with your values and your goals? And are the things you actually spend your time on in line with these values and goals?

The reality is that if there's consistently a huge difference between the time you have and the demands you place on yourself, you will eventually crash and burn. Stay ignited, and find a new way to relate to time. It has been said that referees call time, prisoners serve time, musicians mark time, historians record time, slackers kill time, and statisticians keep time. As athletes, we race against time. The fact remains that we are all given the same amount of time. There are still 24 hours in a day, 168 hours in a week. Make it your goal to use them fully—live every moment.

Know-how

If you are new to triathlon, you undoubtedly have countless questions about how to approach your goals. Where you are today—in terms of fitness, endurance, and speed, for example—will be an important factor in how you shape your training. Fitness and endurance will be key to finishing your first race, while speed and intensity will be more important for experienced triathletes. Rest assured, you've come to the right place, and Chapter 3 will explain everything you need to know. Knowing how to train can be difficult even for experienced triathletes, and sometimes even more of an obstacle.

If you have a few triathlons under your race belt you may be finding it hard to know if you are still improving. When someone moves from doing no activity to doing some activity, the benefits are obvious and significant. As you approach the limit of your fitness, performance, muscle development, and stamina, it won't appear to be in proportion to the amount of training you invested. Rather, at this level you are putting in an increasing amount of effort for smaller returns. Each percentage point of fitness and skill improvement costs more than the previous point. You must be kind to yourself—and patient—because the improvements will probably be harder to detect. You can also look to Chapters 3 and 4 and the sport-specific chapters for ideas about how to refine your technique and do more quality workouts that can lead to the breakthroughs you're looking for.

Support

In Chapter 1, we talked about the challenges of maintaining your relationships as you train for triathlon. As women, we are accustomed to being the ones who give support rather than asking for it. When I travel from city to city to talk to triathletes about how to train, I look out in the audience and see mothers with young kids in strollers, professionals, and

women who have years of experience written on their faces. All of these women have friends and family who count on them for support, just like you do. And yet they come because they are looking for something more. Something just for them.

You are the source of your performance. This is the accountability piece in training. You can't blame others, or your circumstances. Some people may obstruct you, and some may help you enthusiastically, but you are the one who either puts them off or invites them aboard. You will determine your own success and your own failure. You can ultimately achieve the best overall condition of your life.

It won't be easy. It won't happen quickly. It won't be without sacrifice. And it isn't based on luck. Rarely are the accomplishments that we strive for achieved without giving. When you get to that first finish line, or reach a new personal best, you will know that it hasn't been without direction, for you will have modeled yourself in pursuit of goals and good habits. Nor will it have been without tools, because triathlon requires the tools of the trade. Or without knowledge, for, if you follow the guidelines set out in this book, it will be with the help of a heart rate monitor and a few simple training principles that you will grow toward achieving your full potential.

There are times when you are so focused on what you have set for yourself as an achievement that once that level is obtained, you might lose perspective. The triathlon event is not everything in life, but it can be life changing. Being reminded of what you have already achieved by participating in a mentoring capacity creates a healthy appreciation for your abilities. Through a triathlon community composed of many performance levels, a dose of reality creates a balanced and compassionate look at yourself and other triathletes. We can all be victors in the challenges we set for ourselves, but to be superwinners, you must accept the additional challenge of lending your experience and knowledge to others. When the race is over, life still goes on, and the next day brings fresh opportunities. Lend your voice and experiences, share with others around you how and why you work out, and help build a network of women triathletes who are living the healthy, active lifestyle.

The human being is one of the most awesome athletic wonders to ever walk the planet. When we respond to the thrill of an event like the Olympics, we're not responding to whose training regime was the best or which country had the best nutritionist. Instead, we respond to people who grasp a small part of that potential in each one of us and reach out.

It is that reach—especially the reach toward others—that is important. I have been lucky enough to stand at the starting lines with great athletes, and I've been privileged to make whatever small marks I've made. But what I have come to learn is that the reach is more important than the grasp.



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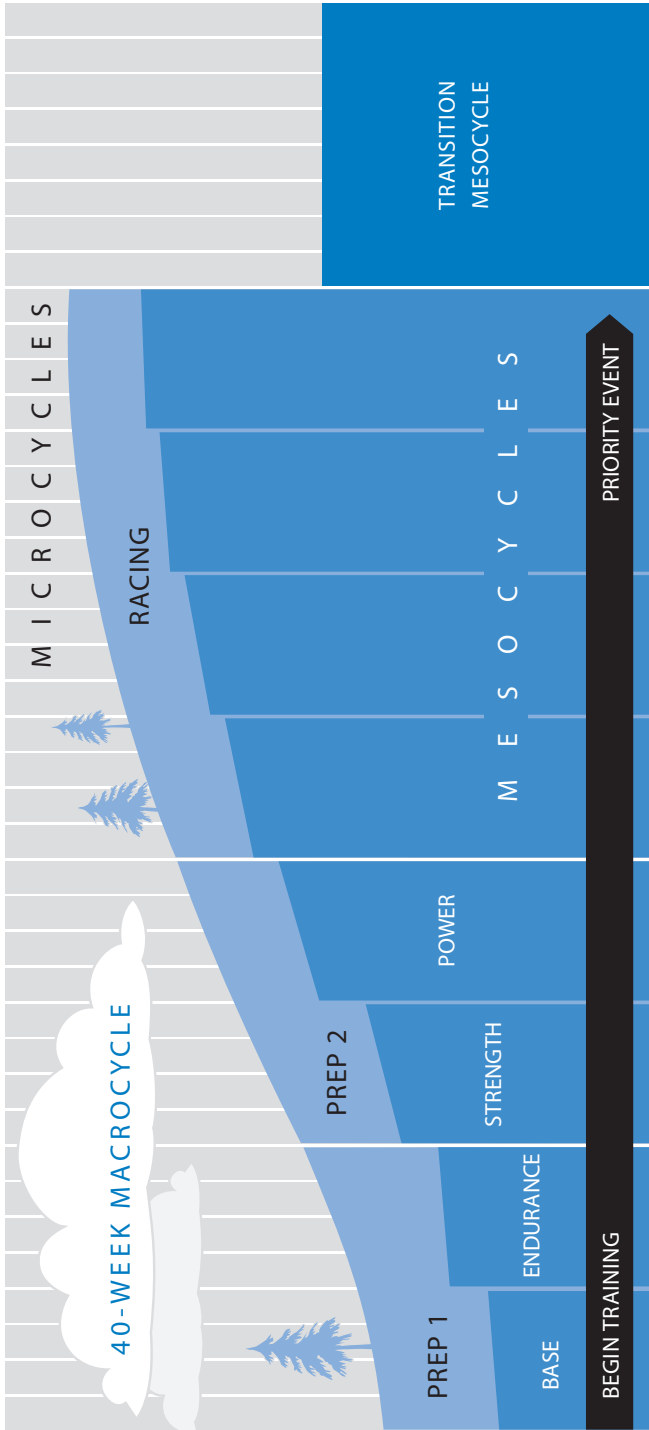
The Fundamentals of Smart Training

When I was training for the 1984 Olympic Marathon trials, after barely qualifying with a 2-hour, 50-minute finish at the Phoenix Marathon, I used a hard/easy training cycle. One day I would go hard, running either short or long intervals followed by rest intervals, and the next day I would run easy for long-distance training.

This is a simplified version of the training approach I now recommend. Many coaches refer to the progression as “periodization,” and I think of my approach as a hybrid of this training method. I now use “progressive training,” which is the sequencing and distribution of training load within a specific training time period. Each phase of training has a different goal or focus. The overall effect of the training sequence is best summarized as stress, response, adaptation. In Chapter 4 we’ll take a closer look at the different phases of training and how they work together to help you achieve your ultimate goal.

Stress → Response → Adaptation

Your training will depend on many factors, but it all comes down to your capacity for training stress and how quickly you adapt to that stress. In triathlon, it’s possible to make a little training go a long way. If you train



Note: A 40-week plan would be more appropriate for an intermediate or experienced athlete.

FIGURE 3.1: Progressive training

appropriately, you don't need to train hard or long. (Of course, if you're training for an Ironman-distance event, there is no way around long hours of training.) You can get to a new height of fitness, and get there fast, by using a smart training plan and a few training tools. First, let's review the fundamentals that make up smart training.

INTRO TO PROGRESSIVE TRAINING

The experience of training can be compared to climbing a mountain (see Figure 3.1). Your journey to the summit (the race or goal you are training for) is the *macrocycle*. Imagine yourself beginning your trek. At first, you are walking a gradual incline that is easy to moderate. As you reach the base of the climb you can see the changing terrain ahead. The different types of terrain you pass through represent *mesocycles* of training. Each mesocycle can be planned based on specific training objectives (base, endurance, strength, power) leading up to your goal race. In each mesocycle the focus of your workouts will change to meet those objectives.

Microcycles are like the inclines, twists, and turns that you encounter within each mesocycle of your training. My training plans will recommend a specific amount of time to be spent in each heart rate zone as a way of distributing intensity between the workouts. There will come a point when, as you climb up to the next mesocycle, workout intensity shifts from being mostly *aerobic* to being mostly *anaerobic*, or above threshold. You might think of this as getting to above treeline, where the air is thin and your lungs are working hard. This marks a significant increase in the intensity of your training. As the weeks go by, you will train in *progressively* higher training zones that have more weight and value in terms of your training load.

In this chapter, you will learn how to calculate your training load, which involves the frequency, duration, and intensity of your workout sessions. You will learn how to structure a workout so you can get the most out of every training session. You will also learn more about the different types of workouts—and why you need to incorporate all of them for successful training. If you are new to triathlon this is a good overview, but don't get too bogged down in the details. In Chapter 4 you'll find two complete training plans that will put all of this into practice and prepare you for your first event. Then you can return to this chapter and perhaps get more out of it.

TRAINING VOLUME

Your weekly training should be 20–25 percent swimming, 40–50 percent cycling, and 20–25 percent running, because this generally reflects the breakdown of distances on race day. Naturally, you will need to adjust your training volume to give more time to your weakest sport.

As a general rule, over the course of your training you need to work up to distances that are at least 70 percent of the swim, bike, and run mileage you will do on race day. Table 3.1 lists the common race distances for sprint, international, half-Ironman, and Ironman distances. You can most likely count on that extra 30 percent coming from race-day exhilaration

and the joy of knowing that your long training is finally at a natural, expected conclusion. Let's consider some examples.

TIP Your weekly training should be 20–25 percent swimming, 40–50 percent cycling, and 20–25 percent running.

To finish an international-distance triathlon (commonly referred to as an Olympic-distance triathlon), you want to be able to complete in a single workout approximately 70 percent of those distances:

For the swim that's about 30 minutes (0.7 of a mile), on the bike it is a ride of about 90 minutes (18–20 miles), and for the run about 45 minutes (4–5 miles). The estimated durations will vary based on your typical pace, so focus on distance, rather than duration, as you build race-readiness.

In case the ultimate long-distance triathlon challenge is of interest to you (and I encourage you to imagine it), preparation for an Ironman-race distance would build to a 1.7-mile swim, an 80-mile bike ride, and an 18-mile run. Sprint triathlons are considerably shorter, but they are no walk in the park. Most professional sprint triathletes train long distances to condition themselves for race day.

TABLE 3.1 Common Triathlon Race Distances

	SWIM	BIKE	RUN
Sprint	750m / 0.5 mi.	20 km / 12.4 mi.	5 km / 3.1 mi.
International (Olympic)	1,500m / 0.93 mi.	40 km / 24.8 mi.	10 km / 6.2 mi.
Half-Ironman	1.2 mi.	56 mi.	13.1 mi.
Ironman	2.4 mi.	112 mi.	26.2 mi.

INTENSITY

There is a time and place for training hard. Intensity is your measure of just how hard you trained. This is also where some training tools come into play. Before we get technical, let's review the most basic measure of intensity.

Rating of Perceived Exertion

Even if you've never heard of the Rate of Perceived Exertion (RPE), or the Borg scale, you've probably used it intuitively. The Borg scale, originally designed by Gunnar Borg, was intended to give you an approximation of your heart rate at different levels of exertion. The scale went from 6 to 20, estimating a resting heart rate of 60 bpm (beats per minute) and a maximum heart rate of 200 bpm for the average person. Each rating was described by how an athlete felt while working out at different intensities—ranging from an easy effort to incredibly hard.

The Borg scale was later adapted by Carl Foster. I prefer his version because it can be tricky to consistently measure the subtle differences between a rating of, say, 13 and 14 on the Borg scale, both of which are moderate. Foster's scale, with 10 levels, leaves less room for interpretation—and, of course, we have countless tools to give us a clear picture of heart rate, which we'll look at next. See Table 3.2 for a comparison of Foster's revised RPE scale and heart rate training zones.

Researchers disagree on the extent to which RPE is an accurate measure of training intensity. Really, it depends on how well you know yourself. But even then, some days your training session will seem unreasonably easy or hard. How you feel when you train is important, but it is best considered in conjunction with heart rate or some other measure of intensity.

Heart Rate

When we look at heart rate and RPE together, we can have a more objective measure of intensity. While subjective methods may seem easier to grasp, they can also be misinterpreted. Have you ever been told by a fitness instructor or coach to “feel the burn” or to “go harder”? Training harder day after day is not likely to give you the results you're after. If you are

TIP As training intensity increases, volume should decrease. If you are training more time in the higher zones, then you need to decrease the duration or distance of your training.