

The following tips are intended for athletes and their families who are new to the sport of triathlon. If your athlete is experienced and has a training program of their own, great! Keep up the good work. But, if you need help knowing where and how to start, read on.

1. **SAFETY FIRST!** Safety is our #1 priority. There's nothing that will ruin the fun of a sporting event faster than broken down gear or an unnecessary injury. Follow these tips to make your race day the Best Day Ever:
 - **Make sure your athlete has appropriate, well-functioning gear** for each portion of the triathlon - good running shoes, comfortable clothing, a properly sized helmet that is not dented or has not been involved in a crash, a bike that has been evaluated for safety, and properly fitted, non-leaking goggles.
 - **There will be plenty of safety supervision on race day, but your athlete needs supervision during training as well.** Make sure your athlete trains in a secure environment with constant supervision, away from traffic for biking and running. Keep eyes on your child at all times, especially during swim training.
 - **Take time to visit the course, if you are unfamiliar.** Let your child see/walk/ride the exact route they will be taking. This will help remove extra stress and confusion on race day.
 - **Teach your child to listen to their body.** Your athlete needs to know to stop if it hurts, whether during training or on race day. There is a difference between challenging your limits and building towards an injury. Teach your child to know the difference.
 - **Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!** It will be hot, hot, hot. Please make sure your athlete is drinking plenty of water as well as electrolytes to replace the ones they will lose from sweating. Staying hydrated before the race as well as during the race is key.

2. **START TRAINING NOW.** Your athlete will have a better race experience if they build endurance. (This is especially true if they are not strong swimmers.) Give them plenty of time to train.
 - **Know your goals.** Make sure your athlete knows the race distances expected prior to race day. Consider training for each sport separately as well as pairing sports back to back. Try a swim followed by a bike ride or a bike ride followed by a run. These are called training "bricks". You might consider planning an actual mini-triathlon to practice the transitions between the sports - swim, bike and run.
 - **Trainings should be fun, not frustrating.** Start your athlete off at a pace that is comfortable for them. A good guideline is to start them at half the distances they'll eventually be swimming/biking/running and add distance gradually. Athletes do not need to train at distances greater than the race day lengths.
 - **Trainings should be reasonable.** Children are prone to unique injuries during their growth years that can be brought on by improper or excessive exercise. Kids are best suited to training over multiple disciplines, which makes training for a triathlon a good fit.

The quality of your training time is what counts, not necessarily the quantity. Training in short sessions may be more fun - especially when in the heat of summer.

3. **TRANSITIONS** - If this is your child's first triathlon, transitioning between sports during the event will most likely be unfamiliar. That is why it is important to help your athlete know what to expect by practicing what will happen in the transition area.
 - **Set up a practice transition area** with:
 - 2 towels (a small one for drying off their feet and a bigger one spread to sit on while putting on shoes)
 - Bike helmet
 - Running shoes and socks (some people do not bother with wearing socks. This is up to your athlete. If you choose not to wear socks, make sure to watch out for blisters.
 - Running/biking clothes (with race bib already pinned on to t-shirt) and shorts or other clothing
 - race bib/belt/stickers (to put your race bib on vs pinning on shirt)
 - a clear water bottle (to easily see how much water they have remaining)
 - food/fuel (if your child is doing the Junior, Senior or Elite distances)
 - Any other gear your child may want or need (Running hat, goggles, life jacket, sunglasses)
 - **Remember where their gear is within the transition area.** In the rush and chaos of race day, losing track of their stuff can be very stressful. Use a simple trick to help your athlete remember where they left their stuff. (Ex: count the racks or transition spaces your athlete will have to pass to get to their own space or set up their stuff near an easily identifiable sign or landmark.) You can also use brightly colored items (towels, stickers on their bike, etc.) to make their area more easily identifiable. Any markers you choose need to not interfere with other athletes around them.
 - **Remind your athlete to walk (not ride) their bike in and out of the transition area.** Volunteers will help athletes remember this on race day. There will be a designated spot at the biking entrance/exit for mounting their bike and getting on the course. You can practice setting up a mounting area a little distance from your practice transition area as a way to help your child practice and remember.
 - Once you arrive on race day, your athlete has set up their gear, and they have figured out how to remember where it is placed, **take time to identify where each transition entrance and exit is located.** Things can get very confusing in the busyness of the transition area. Knowing where they are headed in advance can help your athlete.
4. **SWIMMING** - Swimming is the most dangerous portion of a triathlon. So it is extra important to make sure your athlete is ready come race day. Here are some tips to help your preparation:

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- **Make sure your swimmer knows the number of laps they need to complete.** There will be volunteers stationed on the pool deck and life guards in the water to help. But, ultimately, knowing the course distances is the responsibility of the athlete.
 - **Consider practicing in a group** so your child gets used to what it's like having other swimmers splash and swim nearby.
 - **Have your child wear a swim cap during training.** They do not need the distraction of getting used to a swim cap for the first time on race day.
 - **Stroke type is not important.** Although freestyle is the fastest stroke, it is harder for beginners to learn. If needed, they can swim breaststroke since it is easier and may be more comfortable.
 - **Train in a pool,** since it is most similar to the race day environment.
5. **BIKING** - Although biking may be a familiar activity to your child, biking after a swim and before a run may not be. This can cause a familiar activity to suddenly feel chaotic and unfamiliar. Prepare for this new adventure with these tips:
- **Make sure your athlete's bike has had recent routine maintenance** - seat height adjusted, tires inflated, chain in good working order, etc.
 - **Spend part of your bike training using a scenario similar to race day.**
 - Practice coming up to the bike WET.
 - Practice putting on a t-shirt while WET.
 - Practice putting socks on WET feet.
 - Practice putting on a helmet with WET hands.
 - And practice riding for a distance, you guessed it, WET!
 - **A helmet is mandatory.** Make sure your athlete's helmet fits properly and that they know how to put it on (front vs back) and buckle it with slippery hands.
 - **If your athlete is young, have them practice tying their shoes** or get the laces that make tying unnecessary. Make sure shoelace ends are not too long (to avoid being caught in a bike chain).
 - **Practice passing, being passed and what to do if they should have an unexpected incident** (mechanical failure or injury) by pulling to the right and moving out of the way of oncoming bikers.
 - **Consider wearing sunglasses** on the bike course to protect already-chlorinated eyes against further drying and tearing due to wind.
6. **RUNNING** - Your athlete is almost done by the time they reach the Run Course. This is your time, as their support team, to encourage focus on form, function and a strong finish, not on their ending placement.
- **Practice good running form.** It may feel strange for your athlete's legs to run after coming from a different sport/movement (biking). Teach them to start out with shorter strides initially, elongating them and picking up the pace slowly over the distance.

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- **A great way to teach pacing is to use a track.** Run alongside your child, keeping the pace slower on the first lap. Then, slowly increase the pace over each lap, finishing with a brisk pace at the end. Tell them to look for the finish line and listen for the cheering crowd.

7. **LESS STRESS, MORE FUN!** Overall, the key to a good training program is to keep it fun and interesting to your athlete. Here's some ways to do exactly that:

- **Kids generally tend to resist too much structure.** Disguise the structure by working together, switching up the routine, and loading them up with encouragement. Remember, the real competition is within themselves. All athletes will get a finisher's medal when they cross the finish line.
- **Try training with friends for a team approach.** This is motivating to many kids and keeps training fun. Although teams are not allowed for scoring on race day, it is always fun to compete alongside a few friends. Invite some to join in the fun.
- **Distance is not the only goal. Training for agility, balance, and coordination can help your athlete succeed as well.** The benefit of a multisport event is that it trains your athlete's body in many ways. Utilizing all of the three sports is a good way to mix things up and keep it interesting.
- **Arrive early on race day!** There will be enough adrenaline pumping in anticipation of the event. Your child doesn't need the added stress of rushing to be ready. You will need time to find parking, walk to the venue, set up your athlete's transition area, familiarize them with the entries/exits/courses, and find their designated start location. You, as their supporter, will also need to find a spot to view the race and where you will stand to cheer them on. **Do yourselves both a favor and arrive early.**

8. **CELEBRATE EVERY FINISH!**

- **Your athlete is a winner just for finishing the race. By the time they have crossed the finish line, your child has reached their distance goals and finished the task they set out to complete.** That is a big deal! Celebrate them with encouragement and praise. You should be proud of their performance. We are!

Thank you for participating in the Colin's Hope Kids Triathlon. We know that each of your kids are amazing and we are so incredibly blessed to have them as part of our event. If you have questions about your child's ability or these training tips, we encourage you to contact your family physician. They know your athlete best and can help tailor your training to your athlete's personal needs.

Now go out there and get started!