



TriCoachDara.com Your First Ironman

Here it is the event you have been waiting and training for. The last few months have all been geared to this day; your training has been perfectly orchestrated and planned so that you can be as ready as possible for your first triathlon. But what exactly happens on race day?

While you can go to the Ironman website and read all the rules and schedules, I wanted to give you a broad picture of what to expect and highlight some key points.

You should always read the "Athlete Guide" that the race puts out so you can be as prepared as possible.

Have your bike thoroughly checked over at your local bike shop the week before the race and put new tires/inner tubes in. Of course you will ride on these in the week leading up to the race so there are no unpleasant surprises.

The race actually starts **two days prior**, as you *must* arrive and check in/register two days before the event -- Ironman rules.

This is when you can pick up your race packet, gear bags, and weigh in. You will check your bike into transition the day before the race. Yes, the area is guarded all night! It is a VERY good idea to get to the race venue/town at least 3 days before the race so you can drive and swim/bike/run all the courses. They generally have organized morning open water swims on the course- you should take advantage of that.

To check in, bring with you:

An official photo ID (driver's license, student ID, or passport, etc.)

USAT card, if it is a USAT Sanctioned event..

And maybe your confirmation number (if you signed up on the Net).

At registration you will:

- Confirm your athlete number
- Show your USAT card
- Weigh in.
- Pick up your registration packet that contains your race numbers (one for: the front of your helmet, your bike frame, and your race belt), your swim cap, your timing chip, and pins to attach your numbers if you do not use a race belt. There will be info in there for your supporters too, and hopefully some good freebies! One of your supporters will be able to enter the transition area later in the day when you are racing to pick up your gear IF they are wearing the name tag/bracelet that the race supplies for this purpose- it will be in your check in

packet. Without this specific ID they cannot get in. Let me tell you how nice it is to have all your gear out of transition for you when the race is over, so I hope your race allows this!

Additionally, the race packet will have your meal tickets too .

The Day before Race Day.

- Affix all your stickers and tags to everything.
- Check that your gear bags have all you need in them (You will have 5 bags most likely: T1, T2, Bike special needs, run special needs, and a morning clothes bag.)
- Do your pre-raceday brick: 30 minute bike ride and 15 minute run—all at race pace on the course. I suggest you finish your run at the official race finish so you can keep this in your mind's eye during the race tomorrow- it will keep you going! Check out the transition entrances and exits. If there is an open water swim offered, take advantage of that. They usually have a scheduled open water swim in the 3 days leading up to the race.
- **The day before the race** there will be a mandatory Pre-race meeting. This is very informative, and as I stated, is mandatory!
- This is also the day that you drop off your bike and gear bags (not special needs or dry clothes bags—those you drop on race day usually).

What are these “Gear bags?”

You are not allowed to leave anything by your bike, so all your gear is in bags that you will pick up when you need them at each transition. .

You get 5 bags for each of the following:

- swim to bike transition. T1
 - Put everything in here you need for T1 helmet, glasses, shoes and socks, gloves, food, HR monitor chest strap if you are not wearing it for the swim, and anything else you need for the bike section. Are you wearing your biking gear under your wetsuit? If not, put it in the T1 bag.
- Bike to run transition: T2
 - Put everything in here you need for T2: hat, glasses (if different from your biking glasses), shoes and socks, different shirt if necessary, food, etc.
- Bike special needs: nutrients and anything else you think you might need during the ride—Vaseline, frozen sports drink bottle, gel flask just in case, etc. You pick this up about midway through the ride.
- Run special needs: maybe a change of socks, Vaseline, salt tabs, pain killers (but not NSAIDS), special food, a long sleeved sweater in case it is cold when you run in the dark (tie it around your waist, so you have it). This will be available about half way through the run.

Do not put anything in these bags that you are super attached to as it is possible you won't get them back.

- Dry clothes bag: for what you can change into after you finish or what you wore to the race in the morning.

On race day, if the gear collection area is not congested, a volunteer will actually hand you your gear bags, but if it is busy you will have to get them yourself, so know where your bag is!

Lastly, label *all* your gear, including shoes before you leave home, as the race will have a lost and found after the race so you want to be able to ID your stuff.

What are you wearing for each portion of the race? If this is your first IM race I suggest separate shorts for the bike and the run as being comfortable will help you have a better race. If you have done these before and know you can tolerate doing the whole race in the same gear and every second counts then you can get away with one outfit.

I have done races where I actually changed everything as I am out there for a long time, and one or two more minutes in transition were not an issue.

Race Day

Do nothing new on race day: from breakfast timing and content, to what you wear, to how you race.

Get up in plenty of time to eat the breakfast you always eat before your long training sessions, and do whatever mental preparation you have been training with. Remember, you are trained and ready for this event!

For your support crew (friends and family) there is an “Ironmates” designated area where they can get info about how you are doing on the course and track your progress.

There is a medical information board here too, which they should check periodically to see if their athlete’s name is posted. If it is, check with a volunteer and they will provide more info.

Personal messages can be posted here, and this is the best place to meet up once the race is over. Ironmates are not allowed in the finish chutes.

Get to the transition area with at least an hour and a half to spare before the race starts.

- Check over your bike one last time- tires, brakes, etc. You probably cannot take the bike out of transition, but there are bike techs there to pump up tires and make last minute adjustments.
- Fill your bike bottles with cold liquid and put your frozen drinks in the T2 and run special needs bags.
- During the race and on race morning, no one but registered triathletes will be allowed in the transition area, so have everything you need in there. And remember that once the race starts you will be disqualified if anyone other than a volunteer hands you anything.
- Go to the body marking area and get your numbers put in.
- Go to the porta potty!

- Put on your wetsuit if you are wearing one. Take your time to put it on correctly: use bodyglide or Pam or? to aid in pulling it up. To get the legs over your feet, a plastic bag over your feet helps the wetsuit slide over them. Don't rush.
- Stay warm and calm.
- Do your mental prep- I suggest doing this somewhere away from the crowds.
- Take about 10-15 ounces of sports drink or a gel just before you get in the water.

Swim

Out on the swim course, there will be race crew in kayaks or on PWC's to help you with directions if you get way off course. Additionally, should you have difficulty you can hold onto their boats until you are ok (say your goggles come off, you can hang on there while you put them back on). But if the boat makes forward progress you have to let go or you will be disqualified.

Swim the pace you have trained with and know you can do consistently.

Control your pace, as most novices go out WAY too fast and this can leave you gasping for air and in trouble. Swim YOUR race and don't get upset by contact in the water- it happens, just keep swimming!

As you approach the end of the swim, you can pick up your kicking speed a bit, but don't get crazy! Swim until your hand hits the bottom, then stand to run out. You swim quicker than you can run in thigh deep water!

T1

Some races let you leave sandals and eye glasses at the swim exit.

It does add time to get them when you come out of the water, but it is better than cut feet or not being able to see.

Wetsuit strippers will be there to help you get out of your suit. BOY does this save time!

Control your pace as you run to the transition area, so that you have your wits, and oxygen, about you as you do T1. There will be volunteers in the change tent who will help you with everything. Give them directions on what you need- they are there to help you with EVERYTHING.

Don't rush your transition. Be methodical and do it just as you have practiced so that you have all your need for the bike.

Make sure your helmet is fastened before you leave transition!

Bike

Most races will require that you have your race number on your race belt. Wear it in the back.

When you first get on the bike, take in some plain water and then, if you feel like it you can have some gel or Gatorade. Follow your pre-designed and well practiced hydration and nutrition plan to the letter through out the ride. With all the excitement this can be hard to do, but it should be rote behavior by now.

Initially, try to keep your HR in Z1-2 so you can settle into the bike. No matter how good you feel, do not let your HR out of Z3 (unless it is for a short hill). You want to finish your first race, so behave and control your pace. Today is about finishing, not speed. Keep the intensity/ HR and cadence you have been training with. During the middle of the bike, it would be OK if your HR crept up to the low end of Z3, but preferably you will stay in Z2 for the duration. (If you know you can have a good run after a bike segment done in Z3, then feel free to ride at that intensity.) It will be hard at times to resist the urge to go faster, because you are rested and feeling great, and there may be other racers passing you. But remember, ironman triathlon is all about pacing, and you do not want to blow up on the run coz you did the bike too hard. All you should be paying attention to is HR and cadence, just like in training. You might save a few minutes on the bike by pushing the pace, but you can lose hours on the run from a poorly paced bike split. Additionally, don't get sucked into trying to keep a certain average pace, as this can drive you out of your HR zones and into dangerous territory. If its windy or hilly, aiming for a certain speed at the expense of HR and cadence will ruin your race.

At aid stations, yell for what you want and point to the person you intend to get it from and slow down enough to safely get it, but do not come to a complete stop- those behind you are not expecting to stop! Pull safely off the road and out of the way if you need to stop, and use hand signals and be vocal about what you are doing to alert other racers. Be safe at all times!

You should know how to deal with minor problems like a flat. Do NOT give up on the race just because you flatted, because you can still finish. There will be technical vans out on the course to assist you with bigger problems
There will also be medical vans out on the course and at aid stations. Getting medical assistance does not automatically mean your race is over.

Bike course usually closes 10:30 hours after the race start and if you are still on the course you will be DQ'd.

T2.

Go methodically through this transition, just as you did T1. Use the Volunteers – they are there to help with EVERYTHING!

Make sure you have your race number on! *As you cross the finish line, you must have the race number in front, but for the bulk of the run, you can slide it behind you if you are wearing a race belt.*

Run

Aid stations are located about every mile and will have a selection of things.

Once again, follow your hydration and nutrition plan to the letter, but know that your stomach may have other plans later in the run. Be smart tho- eat small bites of things and don't drink large boluses of liquid. There will be pretzels, gel, sports bars, flat cola and chicken stock available. Generally, my athletes have stated that the chicken stock and cola work great later in the race.

For the first few minutes of the run, remember to shorten your stride and keep your cadence quick, so that your legs can make the transition between biking and running. Your HR may be quite high on the run, but try to keep the pace even and monitor your breathing and RPE.

Self-illuminating light sticks are available at the aid stations, and after dusk you are required to have one.

The run course closes at midnight (for most races), but you may finish if you want. If you do not want to continue, you will be brought back to the transition area.

During the run, there may be segments where you don't feel so good, but hang in there. These times usually pass and you can carry on racing. Maybe you need to walk for a while or stop and stretch. Do it, as quite often we come through those times and feel pretty darn good later on!

Of course, if you get dizzy, light headed or there is any doubt in your mind about your health and safety go to one of the medical tents. They can check you over and give you the all clear to keep racing, or not.

Be safe and be smart.

This day is all about you- everyone is here for YOU, so have fun and savor the day and lap up every minute of it. Finish strong and smile for the camera- You are an Ironman!!!!!!!

Post race

Finisher t-shirts and medals will be awarded at the finish line!

Drink up! But not plain water—some form of carb drink is best. And eat what you can. Remember, to assist in recovery, a 4-1 ratio of carbs to protein is best within 30 minutes of finishing.

Keep walking so that you do not cramp up, then stretch, and change into some dry clothes. There will be massage therapists there too.

Wear your medal everywhere!

Congratulations, Ironman.

Some nutrition suggestions/ guidelines.

Swim-

4- 8 oz. of water at turn around if there is one.

Bike-

12 oz of plain water during first 20-30 minutes of bike. It is best not to take in anything other than water when first on the bike, just so you can settle down.

At 20-minute intervals from then on, your calorie intake should be about 100 calories, so that it equals about 200-300 cals per hour. Some people can take in more, some less, so Practice with this!!!!

20-33oz liquid per hour.

Your calories can be in any combo of solid or liquid nutrients. If you are not going to drink the race Gatorade, plan to eat your gels with water in between aid stations and have those bottles finished by the time you get to an aid station. Electrolyte supplements are a very good idea.

Run:

It would be best for you to walk through the aid stations to ensure sufficient hydration and nutrition.

Electrolyte supplements continue.

Same calorie goals, tho this may be harder to attain on the run: 100-300 cals per hour and 20-30oz liquid.

General considerations.

If you are going to use your own sports drink, you will need more of it than you can carry in bottles. One way around this is to mix a very thick bunch of it and put it in a clear bottle. Mark off serving sizes on the bottle, and then you can add one serving to an empty bottle + water from the aid stations. Your bike will be lighter, and you will have your special drink! BUT, you must practice this and be very careful how you mix and measure your drink—too rich and you will get GI distress, too thin and you won't get enough calories. Start practicing now!

Your nutrition/hydration plan could like this:

After your initial 20 minutes with just plain water,

During: 1st 20 minutes: one serving Gel (roughly 94-100 kcals) + at least 8 oz of water.

2nd 20 minutes: half bottle of sports drink (roughly 100-150 kcals)

3rd 20 minutes: one serving of Gel + at least 8 oz of water.

And just keep alternating. If you plan on eating solid food, substitute it for the Gel. Do not mix sports drink with other calories as it will be hard for your stomach to digest this mixture.

Generally, we can tolerate more calories on the bike than the run, so if possible practice with more calories early in the bike ride. By the time you get to the run, it is going to be very difficult to tolerate solid food, or even gel. So stock up early!

Should you chose to take electrolyte tabs, I highly recommend E-caps (from www.hammernutrition.com) which contain the following:

100 mg of Sodium Chloride	25 mg of Magnesium (Chelate)
50 mg of Calcium (Chelate)	25 mg of K (Chelate)
6.6 mg of B-6	1.6 mg of Manganese

Plan to take 2 tabs 1 hour before swim start. Once out of the water, take another 3 every hour.

Total liquid intake per hour should be 1-1.5 bottles of water or sports drink per hour (20-33 oz)

Remember to race within yourself and follow your pacing plan. Do not be tempted to run anyone else's race. Use RPE, cadence and HR to guide you, just like your practiced. Use your mind as well as your body to deal with race day (as you have practiced with mantras and other mental training tactics), as a race this long is not won, or finished, by just being fit enough.

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