



Beginner's Guide to Triathlon on a Budget

So you want to train and complete your first (or second, or third, or tenth, for that matter) triathlon without spending your life savings on fancy, high tech gear? You've come to the right place. I will try my best to summarise here what the bare minimum equipment is and what upgrades will give you the most bang for your buck (if you have a few extra to spare).

Disclaimer: This is entirely my own opinion, from my own experiences and some people might disagree with me. My goal is only to give you some ideas to start with, the kind of things I wish I had known when I got started.

Before I get to the specifics, a general rule: If at all possible, come out to a few practices and chat with other members before you invest in anything, particularly bigger budget items. You might get some great advice and you never know if someone might have equipment that you could borrow or buy used.

SWIM

The bare minimum:

- A bathing suit. For women preferably a one-piece or a supportive, athletic-style two-piece. For men preferably something more fitted that won't drag a million pounds of water with you. *Good bang for your buck:* heavy duty fabrics such as Speedo endurance or TYR durafast cost only modestly more than a typical lycra bathing suit but last indefinitely in chlorinated pools, while lycra will turn see through and get baggy after a year of training.

- Goggles. If you are buying a new pair I would recommend trying on in-person as everyone's eye sockets are shaped differently and you want to find a pair that is comfortable for you.

- Swim cap. If you don't already have one, don't bother buying a latex one. You get one free at every race so another member will happily give you one from their collection. Silicone caps are more comfortable but not a necessity. If you would like one you can get a stylish GTC one for \$10.

The next step up:

- A wetsuit (one designed for open-water swimming) is second only to a bike in pricey tri equipment, and while most people have access to a bike to get started, most people don't have wetsuit kicking around. A wetsuit serves two functions: keeping you warm during early-season

open-water training and helping you to float better which will make you faster and can be help increase endurance for beginner swimmers. It is by no means a necessity for racing, but I doubt most people could stand late-May lake swimming in 12°C water wetsuit-free. Your options are as follows:

1. Buy a triathlon/swimming specific wetsuit: If you know you're going to be doing tri for at least a few seasons this might be worth it. Ask other members to see if they're selling one and check out sites like kijiji and facebook marketplace. The Running Works rents wetsuits by the week (great if you need one just for race day) and they occasionally sell the suits they rented out last season at a great price. If you're buying new, sign up for email lists and wait for a sale- you can save a big chunk of change.
2. Use a non-triathlon surfer type wetsuit: If you have or can borrow a surf wetsuit this will certainly work to keep you warm during spring training. However, these aren't designed for open water swimming and will create more drag, so not the best option for racing. Because of this I wouldn't recommend investing money into a new one, but a solid option if you already have one to keep you warm while you consider if buying a tri wetsuit is worth it for you.
3. No wetsuit: Particularly if you start open water swimming later in the season, going wetsuit free is definitely an option. Our swim coach Miguel would claim that you can even do the early season swims without one, so if you're feeling really tough come on out and brave the cold water au naturel (just bring a warm sweater for afterwards).

BIKE

The bare minimum:

- A helmet. Doesn't need to be anything fancy, just needs to fit. Never buy a used helmet, because you can't know if it's been in an accident. Important: bike helmets are designed only for single-impact. If your helmet has been in a crash and hit the ground (even if it wasn't that hard and there is no visible damage) the structural integrity is compromised and it won't work as well next time. Just buy a new one. Your brain is worth it. Trust me.

- A bike. Any bike will do as long as it is in working order. I have seen people race on all manner of bikes and you can train and become a stronger cyclist on any kind of bike. That said, smooth skinny tires will be faster than fat knobby ones. If you own or can borrow a road bike rather than a mountain bike or hybrid, you'll find a big difference in your speed.

The next step up:

- If you are going to buy, a road bike is probably your best bet. If you don't know much about what to look for in a used bike, you can ask GTC member James Seery- he's a used bike guru.

- Don't have the budget for a new bike but looking to spruce up your current ride? Spend your money on items that you will be able to transition to your next bike if you decide to upgrade in the future. Clip-in pedals and shoes will improve your cycling efficiency and can move with you to your next bike (and they're not as scary to use as you might think). Or invest in a comfortable saddle so you don't spend that day after cycling waddling around (F.Y.I. When it comes to

saddles, more padding doesn't mean more comfort. Talk to other members or check out Speed River Bicycle for some expert opinions)

RUN

The bare minimum:

- Running shoes. They should fit well and not be completely worn out (look at the treads to determine the level of wear). Not sure what shoes are right for you? Head to The Running Works, the staff there are great at checking your gait pattern and recommending the right shoe for you.

The next step up:

- Elastic shoe laces. Definitely won't break the bank and make it much easier to slip in and out of your shoes in the transition area during a race.

CLOTHING

You'll need some things for training as well as for racing. Remember that in a race you'll want something you can wear in the water as well as on the bike and the run— trying to pull clothing onto a wet body over your bathing suit is a sure way to lose several minutes in the transition area.

The bare minimum:

- Padded cycling or tri shorts. While not technically a necessity (you could get through 10-20 km of cycling without them) a pair of shorts with a chamois (pronounced "shammy") will make cycling a far more comfortable experience. If you want an all-in-one option, tri shorts have a minimalist chamois and can be used for cycling as well as racing, when you will need to swim, bike and run in the same outfit. If you're planning to do a lot of longer-distance rides (40 km+) it might be worth it to invest in a pair of more thoroughly padded cycling specific shorts; however, these won't be comfortable to swim and run in on race day (imagine running in a wet diaper).
- Some kind of top. While lots of people wear more specialized cycling, running, or tri tops, they really aren't a necessity if you're on a tight budget. Typically light synthetic fabrics are more comfortable to sweat in than cotton, but they don't need to be from a fancy specialty store- try winners or walmart if you are in need of a cheap one. For racing you will want a relatively tight-fitting top that will slip under a wetsuit (if you're wearing one) or that won't billow in the water (if you aren't wearing a wetsuit).

The next step up:

- A tri suit: While it might be a bit of a splurge to buy a piece of gear for racing only, I can't tell you how much more comfortable I am racing in a one-piece suit than shorts and a top. Easily slips under your wetsuit (if you're using one) and you never have to worry about a shirt riding up during your ride or run.

***If you are in need of any tri gear we will be ordering GTC logo gear if you'd like to show off your GTC pride. There will be higher quality as well as more budget-friendly options.

TECH

The bare minimum:

Nothing. As much as fancy watches and bike computers and training apps can be great tools you absolutely don't *need* any of them to train and race for triathlon. A watch with a timer might be helpful at times during workouts but you could get away without one.

The next step up:

- If you're into gadgets, a lower-end GPS watch (\$150-200 range, so still pretty pricey) can give you a lot of info without completely breaking the bank. A basic one will give you time, pace/speed, distance, and can be paired with a heart rate monitor if you want to monitor your heart rate during training. You can also typically upload your run/ride data to various websites and apps if you like to track your training or "compete" online with friends.

- A bike computer can also help improve your cycling- consider getting one with a cadence sensor (how many times per minute you turn the pedals) as most beginner cyclists have a slower cadence than is optimal for efficient riding and feedback from a computer can help improve this. Wired bike computers are much cheaper- but fiddly to install and harder to switch from one bike to the next if you upgrade.