

Beat Tri injuries

A pessimist might say that a triathlon simply offers three different ways to get injured. But we're optimists at *Outdoor Fitness*, and the good news is that having an injury doesn't necessarily mean that you have to hang around waiting until you're better.

This is borne out by top swimming strength and conditioning coach Tim Stevenson (onetahlete.co.uk/Twitter: @one_athlete), who's part of the Paralympic GB team for the 2016 Rio Games.

Stevenson told *Outdoor Fitness*: "I was preparing a swimmer for the London 2012 Paralympic Games and about four months before the competition he fell, sustaining a hairline wrist fracture. Disaster loomed, but I knew of research on how training the uninjured part of the body still creates some adaptation in the injured side even though it isn't doing anything. So we tried it, and a fortnight later when the cast was removed strength in both arms was comparable. He went on to win a gold, silver and bronze medal. The body is an incredible thing that we are still a long way from fully understanding!"

DR DANICA BONELLO SPITERI'S TOP TIPS FOR AVOIDING/TREATING TRIATHLON INJURIES

- Core strength training and all-body stretching give the greatest benefits in injury prevention.
- Concentrate on swim and run technique: incorrect technique loads joints and ligaments, resulting in injury.
- Don't ignore niggles that last a week or longer, seek professional advice.
- Don't ask fellow athletes for injury advice, as they often give incorrect information, seek professional advice.
- Hard training is hard, but easy training must be easy to allow for recovery.
- Don't compromise on sleep and food quality. I recommend eating unprocessed foods – as these are essential to improving in the triathlon as they contain more healthy nutrients.

SWIMMING

According to Dr Veronica Bocharova of Florida Gulf Coast University, "Although most triathletes are inexperienced in swimming, the incidence of injuries is quite low. Overuse injuries from swimming account for about 5 to 10% of all injuries in triathletes." And Stevenson adds: "The major issue is over-dominance of the upper body musculature which rotates the shoulders inwards. This position is often intensified in all three disciplines due to poor technique and postural control."

Bocharova states that: "... analysis of the swimming technique is a major factor in designing a rehabilitation or injury prevention programme", which is something that Stevenson is expert at doing for both able-bodied and disabled athletes: "Triathlon is a growing sport amongst disabled athletes," he says, "and will make its first appearance in the 2016 Paralympics. Training disabled athletes highlights the need for individualised programmes. Movement asymmetries are often a precursor to injury. But interestingly, it is the same for able-bodied athletes too; just more pronounced in those with a disability. Working with disabled athletes has also

taught me that there is always a way, we just have to find it. It forces us to become very innovative."

Stevenson also believes that being injured is no excuse for an athlete to stop working: "Injuries are an opportunity to spend time working on other weak areas, whether that's mobility, stability or strength. After all, there's little point always focusing on our strengths and leaving the weak links unchecked. There is no reason to stop completely. My advice is to think about the parts of your training or body you've been neglecting and commit to working on them whilst you're going through the rehabilitation phase. If one of our elite athletes gets injured we would never say, 'just come back in when you're better'; we train around the injury!"

Training-related swimming injuries are one thing, but there are water-related hazards for triathletes to guard against, as Dr Danica Bonello Spiteri explains (Box 1). Spiteri is not only a consultant in Sports & Exercise Medicine (sportsmedicinemalta.com) she is also an elite triathlete who represented Malta in the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games and in the 1st European Games in Baku, Azerbaijan.

DR DANICA BONELLO SPITERI ON SWIMMING: THE DANGERS

- **Water temperature:** In colder waters, novice swimmers may spend longer in the water and are more likely to struggle with hypothermia. But in warmer waters, hyperthermia has been recorded with elite athletes, although this is more so in endurance swimming.
- **Swallowing water** and ingesting living organisms such as blue-green algae and *Leptospira*, but these risks are low in the UK.
- **Drowning** and near-drowning after inhaling water into the lungs, and causing episodes of pneumonitis and swimming-induced pulmonary oedema have been recorded.

Thankfully the above are quite rare. Commoner problems occur during triathlon swim starts, with athletes flinging their arms and legs around. Panic is common, resulting in hyperventilation in what commonly referred to as the washing machine. The arms and legs of the swimmer beside you may hit you on the head or knock your goggles off, meaning the end of your triathlon before it's even started. You can minimise this by practicing similar situations in training.



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