

RIAK.

F I T N E S S

BALANCE – SIMPLICITY - ACCESSIBILITY

Winter Triathlon Training Tips

1. General tips

Let's be honest, training through the British winter can be the stuff of nightmares. There is a reason why every Hollywood movie depicts our great country as drizzly, grey and miserable...a British winter stays with you.

In this note, our hope is to provide you with a few tips that just might help the winter become a tolerable experience.

Have a clear winter goal

The first thing that can help make the winter a productive time rather than a season to survive, is to have a clear plan of what you want to get out of it. Bear in mind that weather will probably play a part in what sessions you can and cannot reasonably perform regularly and that illness will inevitably rear its ugly head but give yourself a specific goal to work towards.

Your goal could be anything. It could be conditioning for a spring sportive; preparing for an early season duathlon; or simply speed work to nail a specific Parkrun time.

Get organised

As the amount of daylight is drastically reduced in the winter, it is imperative that no minute of it is wasted by faffing around and indecision.

Make sure your sessions are all planned in advance, and you have a little collection of back-up sessions for when you really can't get outside.

Few things are worse than failing to plan and finding yourself outside in the dark trying to sort out a mechanical or risking organ failure on a cold mindless base ride! Get your kit sorted for the winter and a plan in place!

Find solace in the gym

The winter is a great time to build strength and address any niggles you might have been harbouring. Muscular imbalances are particularly rife among runners, so plenty of single-limb work is strongly recommended.

If you don't want to commit to a gym membership, there are plenty of pay-as-you go gyms or apps out there offering discounted sessions. Class Pass and PayAsUGym are just a couple of options.

2. Swimming

Plan progressive and interesting pool sessions

Not everyone will agree with this, but pool swimming can sometimes feel like a slow painful death at the hands of the gods of boredom. However, winter pool sessions with a considered aim can be worth their weight in gold and should be prioritised by any sensible triathlete.

Take the lack of daylight outside of working hours as a nature's way of telling you it's time to sort out that hinge kick or swinging recovery.

Swimming is such a technique driven sport that whilst you might not save as much time comparative to cycling or running, by improving your swimming the energy saving benefits will translate into even stronger bike and run segments. Remember: triathlon is one sport not three.

If you are interested in improving your swim efficiency, join us for a video swim assessment and we can give you the tools to develop your own stroke.

Join a swim squad

If you suffer from a lack of motivation when it comes to pool time, why not join a local swim or tri club?

Nothing will see you improve your conditioning faster than trying to keep up with better swimmers. You might also be surprised at how much you can pick up from simply talking to people. However, we would recommend always accepting advice with a critical ear. Swim technique is an area of great debate and there is a lot of misinformation circulating.

3. Cycling

Plan for the worst, pray for the best

Cycling kit is hideously expensive. No argument there I trust? Nonetheless, wind and rain are a predictable phenomenon during the winter months. Therefore, rather than investing in expensive wheels, invest in some decent winter training kit. In particular, we would recommend some nice warm Marino wool socks as willingly riding with cold feet should be considered self-harm in our eyes!

The conditioning benefits of riding more frequently because you are prepared for the elements will far outweigh any aerodynamic benefits of even the highest spec tech. Your body's frontal profile is the largest contributor to drag in cycling. So, put simply, if you end up carrying spare timber from a lack of winter training, you are going to have to punch a bigger hole in the air.

Invest in some decent kit and you will be more likely to get out consistently and your power to weight ratio will pay dividends during race season.

Get warm before you leave

This might seem like a patronising one, but it makes a ridiculous amount of difference to both your motivation and how enjoyable your ride will be.

Ensure your extremities (your feet, hands and head) are warm as these are the hardest to keep that way. It is hell starting a ride with cold hands and trust us, they will not warm up until you are back home cradling a cup of tea.

Mitigate the effect of the cold on your extremities and pay them special attention before you leave. Walk around in your slippers, wear a pair of gloves and put on a little woolly hat. You won't regret it!

If you are meeting friends on the road and there is always that one that's late, give them a cut off time after which you'll leave without them. Don't sacrifice your warmth because they haven't followed the tips above!

Double up on overshoes

Decent socks are a must and you could try doubling up on them if it is particularly cold or rain is forecast. However, this might make your shoes uncomfortably tight and socks bunching under the balls of your feet can be extremely painful on a long ride.

So, double up on your outer shoe covers. A pair of spring cotton overshoes underneath a pair of waterproof shoe covers tends to work nicely. Make sure there is enough clearance for your cleat to clip in and your feet should be kept nice and toasty.

Get the train out of town

If you live in an inner-city area, riding out of town amongst the traffic can ruin what would otherwise be a rather nice ride. This can be exacerbated further if the weather is miserable.

Getting the train out of town to a more rural area can take some of the pain out of this process. Typically, winter rides will be shorter than the big volume rides you would do in the summer. So, allow for a similar amount of time and get the train out. Hit a shorter focused ride and either ride back into town as your cool down or get the train back in.

Regardless, we always advocate riding early in the mornings to miss the worst of the traffic. When the mornings are still dark, a good strategy can be to time your train journey or ride out of town to coincide with sunrise.

Just remember, you will cool down rapidly once back on the train into town so take another layer with you to put on for the trip home.

Take plenty of food

It can be harder to eat when it's cold out as blood will be redistributed elsewhere than your digestive system. However, if you find yourself with a puncture, waiting for a train or generally starting to get a chill on, have something to eat. Food in your stomach will raise your core temperature and take the edge off the cold.

Taking more food than you think you will need with you on a winter ride is a really sound strategy. Trains if you are taking one can be delayed so don't exacerbate the misery of being cold and wet by also being starving! It's just not worth it and shivering doesn't burn that many calories!

Have a winter bike

This is quite an ostentatious suggestion and not possible for everyone. However, having a cheap or older bike you don't mind getting messed up can actually save you money long term.

Water can get into bottom brackets causing corrosion and most of the drivetrain will likely need replacing come spring and summer racing. If a certain amount of degradation is certain, then why apply this to premium parts? The difference in cost of replacing a Shimano 105 set and a Sram eTap set is night and day.

In fact, your nice carbon Di2 bike with super slick aero wheels, could cost more to maintain through all four seasons than if you were to buy a cheap second-hand aluminium one for winter use.

Cost aside, the stress of watching your race bike disintegrate in front of you is reason enough to buy a baby brother and keep your favoured son protected from the elements.

Spray off your bike as soon as you get home

Winter is cold and miserable. Fact. But the heart-wrenching sadness of seeing rust on your prized possession is a million times worse! So, put on your big boy/girl pants and spray/wipe down your bike as soon as you get home.

Apply a little lube to the key areas and then you can get inside warm knowing your baby is safe.

Winter tyres

This is a simple one. Get them and keep your tyres at the right pressure.

Check the outside of your tyres for their optimal pressure range and opt for the lower end of the range when it is wet to allow for greater traction.

Join Group rides

Motivation during this period can be a real incumbrance. Joining up with a group can be the difference between getting out and getting bed sores from too much napping.

There are so many friendly clubs out there for all experience levels. In contrast to pretty much anything else to do with cycling or triathlon, club memberships are usually very good value for money.

The British Cycling or British Triathlon websites have club finders, so share the pain and join other road warriors at the weekends and you might even have a few fond memories of winter.

4. Running

Visibility is key

Even in an urban environment, you need to be seen. Our recommendation would be to get a head torch. Yes, you will look like a murderer but at least not a good one...as you will be seen.

The obvious benefit of a headtorch and visible clothing is allowing others, whether they be motorists or pedestrians, to behave in the knowledge you are there.

Regardless of where you run, you will likely need to cross roads and to see the floor ahead of you. When the sun comes up, you can always take the torch off and wrap the strap around your wrist like watch.

A half-decent head torch will set you back between £20-30.

If it's raining or snowing, wear a woolly hat

This is a simple and effective way to make your winter runs more enjoyable.

A woolly hat isn't just for the cold, keeping the rain off your heat sensitive ears can make a real difference. If you run with music too, the effect is like creating a little cocoon.

Blood in your legs not under your skin

Running in your shortest short shorts through the winter does not make you tough. It makes you red and your muscles less efficient.

There are a few reasons why winter race times are generally slower than in the summer. There are the atmospheric conditions and increased humidity but there is also the fact that feeding warmth to working muscles is more of a challenge.

Covering exposed skin will result in less vasoconstriction and allow more regular blood flow. The reason our cheeks or legs go red after prolonged skin exposure to the cold is believed to be due to your blood vessels under the skin dilating and then restricting too quickly and the rapid narrowing causes the vessels to burst.

Why would you want this when you can wear a pair of running tights under your shorts and spare your blushes. Pun intended.

Set your sports watch to look for satellites by your window

If you have a GPS enabled sports watch that needs to locate satellite positions before it will track your progress, don't stand outside in the cold waiting for what seems like an eternity watching loading bars to fill. Turn your watch on 10 minutes before you go out and leave it on the window sill nearest your front door. Don't go anywhere until the satellites have been found!

If it loses signal whilst you collect the watch and move through the house to the front door, the chances are it will pick up signal again more quickly than if you had started the process from scratch outside.

Reduce the time you spend performing dynamic stretches

If you do not already incorporate dynamic stretches as part of your ordinary run training structure, visit our 'Training Fundamentals' article and we'll help you see sense!

Having said that, during winter, you want to keep your heart rate up and warmth in your muscles. Reduce the amount of time you spend standing still during your dynamic stretch routine. Flow the stretches into each other and focus on the more dynamic ones like butt kicks and high knees.