

4 Ironman Training Rules

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You've watched the award-winning telecasts of the race for the past several winters. Your friends have gone off and raced at Lake Placid, Wisconsin, or Florida and come home changed people. You've felt compelled, you couldn't resist—you signed up for an Ironman this year! Congratulations, you have an exciting road ahead of you. It's a road that you will need to pave with a lot of hard work! But success will not come from hard work alone—smart training is critical in such a challenging endeavor. To make the most of your efforts, follow these four Ironman training rules.

Rule #1: Rest as diligently as you workout.

When you workout, you break your body down. On the level of cells and tissues, and on a cumulative level, your body is damaged when you workout. In order for you to improve, you must allow your body to sufficiently repair itself. Working out hard, without adequate rest, will bring short-term improvements, but guaranteed long-term problems (i.e., overtraining syndrome, injuries, burnout, poor performance). Ample rest on the other hand, will allow you to steadily improve.

So what constitutes rest? Rest is time spent doing activities that are low-key, physically and mentally. Rest is your chance to be "off" in a world that wants you to constantly be "on". You are resting when you are watching a movie, reading a book for pleasure, listening to music, socializing with family and friends, or doing similar activities. During this time, your body can sufficiently dedicate itself to repairing itself. When you are working out, working, commuting, or doing chores you are doing, not resting. Rest does not come easy to many triathletes. Many are busy bodies who must always be doing something and who feel that rest is a waste of time. Learning to rest and making it a priority will help you tremendously.

You're thinking we're crazy. Working out is a "good" breakdown of your body, right? True, working out is one of the healthiest things you can do, but in the absence of sufficient rest, it becomes unhealthy. Think of resting as giving your body the chance to heal itself so when it comes time for your next workout, you are fully ready to give it your all. Think of rest not as "doing nothing", but as an

important part of the training process. Rest as diligently as you workout. See Table 1 for some guidelines on rest.

Table 1. Guidelines on Rest

Full Training Days	--Allot at least some time for rest each day. The demands of life can make this difficult, but do what you can to carve out at least some time each day for rest. -- <i>Do not</i> make up missed workouts on your scheduled rest day. Omit them and move on.
Rest Days	--Each week, take a rest day. Do not do any workouts on this day, and during the time you'd normally workout, rest. --Occasionally schedule rest days on the weekend, so you can have a day with few demands altogether.
Rest Weeks	--Every three to four weeks, take a rest week. Do not do any hard workouts this week. Do only moderate-distance aerobic workouts. Do not do long workouts, anaerobic workouts, or strength/power training workouts. --Occasionally schedule rest days on consecutive days in your rest weeks.

I can swim on my rest days, right? Or lift weights? Absolutely not. Doing so misses the point of resting. Just because swimming is easy on your legs and just because strength/power training is not part of your sport does not mean that you are resting when you are doing them. Only rest is rest. Anything else is cheating yourself out of your best performance and cheating yourself out of optimal health.

Rule#2: Practice your race nutrition to the letter.

Consult with a good triathlon coach or sports nutritionist who has experience working with triathletes and create a plan for your race nutrition. Have your plan set about three months prior to your race. Then, in all of your long rides and/or long bricks, practice your race nutrition to the letter. You cannot expect to do your long workouts using one approach and save your race nutrition approach for your race only. You need to experiment with your approach, work out any kinks, make adjustments, and try again. You want your race nutrition to be dialed in by the time you get to your race. You want it to be automatic. You want to *know* that it will work for you, not hope that it will work for you.

From a sports nutrition perspective, treat each long ride or long brick as a race. Practice your pre-race, during-race, and post-race nutrition as you plan to execute it on race day. You will find some guidelines on race nutrition in Table 2.

Table 2. Guidelines on Race Nutrition

Pre-Race Nutrition	--Eat breakfast 2-3 hours before your workout/race. --Eat 500-1,000 calories worth of a predominately-carbohydrate meal with minimal fat or fiber. Small
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	<p>amounts of protein are ok and help some triathletes.</p> <p>--Eat foods that you like and that you comfortably digest.</p> <p>--Consider using meal-replacement shakes like those made by Ensure or Boost that provide ample nutrition in an easily digestible format.</p> <p>--Starting 30 minutes after breakfast, sip on the same energy drink you will use during the race. Drink one water bottle's worth prior to the start of your workout/race.</p>
<p>During-Race Nutrition</p>	<p>--Consume water at a rate equal to your sweat rate. Your sweat rate is the amount of water you lose in your sweat in one hour of working out. To test your sweat rate, weigh yourself naked and dry before and after a one-hour aerobic run in conditions similar to your expected race conditions. Drink one water bottle's worth of energy drink during your run. In your pre-run weigh-in, hold this water bottle, filled with energy drink. In your post-run weigh-in, hold this water bottle, empty. Your weight loss, converted to ounces, is a good estimate of your sweat rate, in fluid ounces per hour.</p> <p>--Consume 1,000 mg of sodium for every 32 fluid ounces of water you consume.</p> <p>--Consume 200-300 calories per hour of simple carbohydrates.</p> <p>--Consider using an energy drink with adequate sodium like many on the market and on race courses today. Consuming such an energy drink will greatly simplify things for you. Simply drink at your sweat rate and you will get ample water, sodium, and simple carbohydrates, all in an easily digestible format. Consult with a good triathlon coach or sports nutritionist who has experience working with triathletes to fine-tune your personal approach.</p> <p>--Start taking in your during-race sports nutrition products as soon as you are in a good rhythm on the bike and the run. Avoid taking in nutrients in the transitions or when just getting started on the bike or run, unless you really go slowly through transition. Otherwise you are asking your body to digest nutrients at a time when your gastrointestinal system is compromised and under a lot of stress.</p>
<p>Post-Race Nutrition</p>	<p>--Immediately after your race, drink one of the recovery drinks on the market or 300-500 calories worth of chocolate skim milk, non-fat fruit yogurt or other recovery drink/snack. Each of these options is ideal as a recovery drink/snack b/c they contain easily digestibly</p>

	carbohydrates and protein near the optimal ratio. --Drink energy drink or water all day after your race. If energy drink still tastes good, drink it. If not, drink water. --As soon as you feel ready to do so, eat a normal, healthy meal, with foods providing carbohydrates, proteins, and fats.
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Rule #3: Lift weights like a champion athlete.

High-quality strength/power training prevents injuries and improves performance for triathletes. To get maximum benefits, you must prevent bodybuilding tenants or fitness fads from shaping your workouts. To lift weights like a champion athlete:

1. Keep your workout to an hour, give or take.
2. Do total-body, multi-joint exercises that focus on movements, not muscles. Examples include all forms of squats, lunges, step-ups, and similar exercises as well as all forms of push-ups, all forms of pull-ups, and all standing pushing and pulling exercises. If you can get some instruction from a good triathlon coach or Certified Strength & Conditioning Specialist, Olympic lifts, medicine ball throws, and plyometrics are all great strength/power training exercises as well.
3. Do no more than 12 total sets per workout and keep your sets in the 4-10 reps range. Early in the year, start with 10 reps per set and as you progress towards your race, reduce the amount of reps you are doing per set. By the time you get to 12 weeks from your Ironman, you should be doing sets of 4-6 reps.
4. Lift twice/week most of the year. Reduce to lifting once/week 12 weeks before your Ironman, and do not lift in the last three weeks before your race.

Rule #4: Include interval training (anaerobic workouts).

Interval training is one of the most effective ways of developing your endurance. To maximize your endurance improvements, include interval training workouts in your swim, bike, and run training. To interval train effectively:

1. Try the parceled out effort (POE) approach to intervals. For POE intervals, go as fast as you can sustain with successive intervals. For example, you may do *15 X 100 yards POE, rest interval = 15 seconds* as set of swim intervals. To do this set of intervals well, view it as a 1,500-yard race, broken up by short rest intervals where you rest at the wall. Done properly, your pace for each 100 will remain the same, or get slightly faster, as you progress through the set of intervals. If your pace slows with successive intervals, you are going to fast. Go as fast as you can sustain throughout the whole set of intervals.

2. Do 1-2 interval training workouts per week in swimming, 1-2 interval training workouts per week in cycling, and one workout per week in running.
3. In all three disciplines, start with long intervals (which are more aerobic) and work to short intervals (which are more anaerobic) as your training progresses. In swimming, start with intervals of 300-500 yards and progress to intervals of 50-100 yards. In cycling, start with intervals of 10-15 minutes and progress to intervals of 30 seconds to one minute. In running, start with intervals of 3-10 minutes and progress to intervals of 30 seconds to one minute. In cycling and running, make about 1/3 of your interval training workouts uphill intervals or big-gear intervals.

Following these four rules will help you make your Ironman a success! Enjoy the process!

To learn more about Jason, Will, and Tri-Hard Endurance Sports Coaching, visit www.Tri-Hard.com.