



# CHRISSIE WELLINGTON'S TOP 50 RACE TIPS

You've clocked up the training miles but what happens when you reach race week? Who better to tell you than the three-time Ironman World Champion, **Chrissie Wellington**?

**H**ere follows suggestions and lessons that I've gleaned en route from being a sinking age-grouper to three-time World Ironman Champion. I don't profess to have all the answers but I hope that some of these tri tit-bits will be useful as you prepare for your next start line.

Before we go through my tri checklist, a word of warning: don't try anything new during your A race(s). There'll be suggestions in this article that are new to you – whether it's nutrition, wearing earplugs or lubing techniques. The key is that you practise, practise and then practise again in training or during B races.

So, without further ado, here are my top 50 tips for race-day success...

## RACE WEEK

**1** Surf the event website. Study the course maps and take note of any steep descents, climbs, corners and aid station locations (and what food and drink they offer so you can factor this into your nutrition plan). Look at wave start and cut-off times, and the times of the



athlete briefing and registration. Seek advice and insights from athletes who've done the race before. If you're driving to the venue, plan your route and pick a place to park (taking road closures into account).

**2** Know the race rules. You don't want to risk getting penalised or even disqualified and having to explain the DNF to work colleagues/teammates/the police. If you're unsure, speak to the race director or head referee.

**3** Massages are great, but not the day before a race as they can leave you feeling sluggish. I always have a gentle rub down on the penultimate day. Shave/pluck/clip/wax and make sure you clip your toenails.

**4** Don't overhydrate or overeat. I cut down on fibre and spicy or rich foods three days out to reduce the likelihood of GI distress. I stick to plain foods, with a lower GI index, such as white rice, bread and pasta. Retaining the same calorific intake, coupled with the reduction in training, should ensure your glycogen stores are full but not overflowing. Avoid eating

anything new in race week; there are a lot of freebie food samples at race expos – don't be tempted to try them!

**5** Watch the weather forecast to ensure you have the necessary clothes and kit [see 'Peak for London' on p74 for a list of the equipment you'll need – Ed]. Check your equipment to ensure you haven't forgotten anything and make sure that everything is in working order. Lay your kit out in separate piles for each of the three disciplines and pack your bag(s) – including preparing/mixing your nutrition – the day before the race.

**6** If your chamois in your race shorts is thinner than the chamois in your cycle training shorts, you should adjust the saddle height by a few millimetres to compensate for the difference.

**7** Engage in a race course recce if you can. Check where you'll come in from the swim ('swim in'), where you'll leave transition on the bike ('bike out' and mount line), where you'll 'bike in' (and dismount line) and where you'll 'run out'. If there's time, walk through it to get your bearings. →

## PERFORMANCE SPECIAL

**8** Visualise the race in your mind. Have a mental, as well as a physical, plan to deal with the inevitable ups and downs to give yourself the peace of mind that you can cope with the unexpected.

### RACE MORNING

**9** Set two alarms – a gentle sound rather than a blaring buzzer – for an early-morning wake-up call. Have a shower to wake you, and your body, up.

**10** Deep breathing and self-massage will help relax muscles and ease tension. Think positive thoughts and make positive statements from the moment you wake. This is YOUR day and you've done all you can to prepare for it.

**11** Eat your breakfast around 2.5hrs before your race start time. Consume low fibre, simple (low GI) carbs, with a small amount of fat and protein. I have hot rice cereal, made with water, with nut butter and honey stirred in. Sip water and have a cup of tea or coffee if you're used to it.

**12** Put your race kit (and watch) on, and 'over dress' as the early mornings can be cold (you can always remove layers). Put your timing chip on your left ankle to prevent it getting caught in the chainring. Secure the Velcro with a safety pin, and lube the area with Vaseline to prevent chafing. Ladies (or gents) with long hair, make sure your ponytail is at the nape of your neck so you can put your bike helmet on easily. Have your headtorch to hand as early mornings can be dark.

**13** Leave plenty of time to get to the race start to avoid a last-minute rush. Take into account traffic jams and queues. A short walk can help wake your mind and body.

### TRANSITION

**14** When you rack your bike, look for a landmark that'll help you locate it after the swim. Pump your tyres up first so that you've more time to sort out any unforeseen problems – taking your own track/foot pump is always a good idea. Put the bike in an

easy gear, and ensure the handlebars face you on exit from the swim so you can steer straight out of transition.

**15** If you wear bike shoes, sprinkle talc inside and loosen the straps before a) placing them next to your bike, b) clipping them into your pedals or c) attaching them to the bike with elastic bands to keep them upright when running to the mount line.

**16** Secure spares to your bike. It's important to ensure that the valve on your spare inner tube – or tubular – fits the wheels. This may mean you need an extender if the valve is shorter than the depth of the rim. Reset your bike computer.

**17** Place a small towel next to your bike, and put your

run shoes on top. Make sure that the tongue and laces are open and, if you use them like I do, put one sock in each shoe. I also sprinkle talc inside my run shoes (and socks) to help soak up water and prevent blisters.

**18** Secure your bottles, gels, bars and so on to the bike. I use a front-mounting aerobar bottle for water, which only ever has 3in of water in because any more affects the bike's weight and handling.

**19** Put your unbuckled helmet upside down on your handle/aerobars on the side of the bike that you'll arrive at after the swim. Make sure the lenses of your sunglasses are clean, and then put them inside your helmet with the arms open. Place your number belt (if you're wearing one) upside down on top with the clasp open. →



## PERFORMANCE SPECIAL

**20** Make sure you leave time to get into your wetsuit. Liberally apply lubricant (non-oil based to stop it destroying the neoprene) to areas prone to chafing and also on your ankles to make wetsuit removal easier. I always cut an inch off the legs of my wetsuit to make it easier to get it off. Use a rubber glove or plastic bag to apply lube, as it'll prevent your hands from getting oily (which affects the 'catch' in the swim). Pull your wetsuit high into your crotch and bend over to make sure there are no ruffles around the waist.

**21** Buy some cheap, throwaway slippers/flip flops to wear down to the swim start. This helps avoid cold feet (literally) and prevents any cuts on sharp objects. Have two pairs of swim goggles at hand – one for bright sunlight and one for dull days. That way you also have a spare pair in case, say, the strap breaks.

**22** Wearing two swim caps and silicon earplugs can help make the water seem less cold (peeing in your wetsuit is also a good idea...).

**23** Focus on yourself and don't watch what others are doing. Yes, the bike next to you might be more bling than your antique Penny Farthing, but it's the engine that counts. Now isn't the time for tri perving – save it for after the race! Close your eyes, relax, breathe and accept that nerves are normal!

## SWIM

**24** Warm up 15-25mins before the start. I usually get in the water 15mins before the gun goes off and do 10mins warm-up (with some speed pick-ups) and then 5mins on the start line, creating a space for myself. I don't run before a triathlon start, as I want the blood to be in my arms not my legs. But, if you do decide to run, make sure you have time for a short warm-up swim, too.

**25** Weaker swimmers should start at the side of the pack or towards the back. Try and scull on your belly, making wide circles with your arms and legs to establish a space of water for yourself.



**26** Be prepared to sprint in the first 200-400m. Ordinarily I breathe every two strokes but in this first 400m sprint I keep my head down more and breathe every four-to-six (but don't hyperventilate!). This can also help prevent goggles getting knocked off. If your goggles do come off, don't panic. Just roll on your back or tread water, put your goggles back in position and continue swimming.

**27** There can be traffic jams at the turning buoys so weaker swimmers should stay on the outside of the turn and then work in as you pass the buoy. You'll be less frustrated and won't need to break your stroke.

**28** Most swimmers will be in a pack. Try to sit on the feet, or even at the waist, of another swimmer to get their draft and reduce your own energy expenditure. Even if



you're 'following feet' you'll still need to look up and 'sight' to remain on course. This is where it helps to have pre-selected navigation landmarks.

**29** Kick your legs harder coming into T1 to prepare your legs for the short run and the bike leg. Mentally rehearse the first transition before you finish the swim.

## T1

**30** Immediately remove your goggles and swim cap, and then take your wetsuit off to the waist. Remove one leg and then step on the unoccupied wetsuit leg to remove the other. Don't panic if you can't get your suit off immediately. Relax, breathe and try again – sit down if you have to (but don't get in the way of other athletes).

**31** Put your sunglasses on first, then the helmet. This way they'll be under the

helmet straps and won't get knocked off when you pull your helmet off in T2. Put your number belt on with the number on your back.

**32** Wheel your bike by the saddle, not the handlebars, so the pedals don't bash your legs en route to the mount line. Remember, don't jump on your trusty steed until you get to the mount line!

## BIKE

**33** Wait until you've settled into a rhythm (say, after the first km) before you take on any nutrition/hydration. Slow down for aid stations and watch for other cyclists.

**34** Begin and finish the bike in a lower gear than you plan to race in. Use the hills, corners and aid stations to sit up and/or get out of the saddle. This variation in position will help you to recruit different muscles, and prevent fatigue and discomfort. Race at YOUR pace. Don't worry about what others are doing, but DO obey the drafting rules!

## T2

**35** Increase your cadence in the last 500m. Loosen the strap on your bike shoes about 100m from T2 and slip your feet out. Dismount barefoot, so you can run swiftly back to transition. Don't unclip your helmet until you've racked your bike.

**36** Put on socks, shoes, hat/visor and fuel belt (if you're wearing one). Rotate your number belt so the number faces forwards. Take a few deep breaths.

## RUN

**37** Ignore your legs – they'll undoubtedly feel wooden and wobbly. This won't last, and within a kilometre you'll settle into your stride and shake off any biking discomfort. I try to maintain a shorter stride length, keep my shoulders down, lift my hips and look forwards.

**38** Constantly check yourself. Relax your shoulders, face, neck, arms and hands. Tension in these →



# PERFORMANCE SPECIAL

areas manifests itself as tightness throughout the body. I hold my gels in my hands to stop me clenching my fists. Maintain a constant breathing rate (the same is true on the bike). And smile!

**39** Remember to enjoy every moment of the finish chute and celebrate when you cross the line. The timing chip records your time, so look up, smile and let the race photographer get a snap shot for you to treasure!

## NUTRITION

**40** If the race has a 'special needs' facility, use it! Have spare food/drink just in case you lose a bottle on the bike or you need more nutrition than you anticipated.

**41** In half and full iron-distance races, I take on one gramme of carbs per kilo of body weight per hour. The carbs are a mix of sugars (glucose and fructose to increase glycogen absorption). In an Ironman, I have two bottles (430 calories in each) on the bike, plus two gels and a chocolate bar. I make my first drinks bottle slightly less concentrated than the second, to make it more palatable early in the race (especially if I've swallowed some open water!). Following the formula above, I have one gel every 25mins – washed down with water – on the run.

**42** Know the electrolyte (including salt) values in your food and drinks. Unless you're a very heavy sweater you probably don't need to top this up with tablets. Take care with caffeine tablets as they can cause GI distress (I speak from experience!).

**43** Use the water, ice and sponges at aid stations to help cool your body on a hot day. These can also be shoved down your race top, under your hat or down your shorts. I sometimes hold ice cubes in my hands. (Speed) walking through the aid stations is a good strategy if you're getting tired, and to ensure you get the nutrition/hydration that you need.



**44** Respect the race organisers and volunteers, and don't throw any rubbish on the course. Save it for the aid stations!

## PSYCHOLOGY

**45** Only use positive words and affirmations. Have a mantra and a couple of special songs/poems to repeat. I write my mantra on my water bottle and wristband to give me a boost. Draw heavily on positive images – family, friends, holidays, past races, a plate of chips – and recall times when you've struggled and overcome hurdles or hurt. This will give you the confidence that you can overcome dark times and come out the other side.

**46** Break the race up into smaller, more manageable segments. I always think of the marathon as 4 x 10km with a little bit more. You might even think about just getting to the next aid station, or lamppost, or Portaloo, and from there setting another landmark goal. Stay in the moment and don't think too far ahead.

**47** Draw on the energy from spectators. If you thrive on support from family and

friends, persuade them to come and cheer you on, make banners, wear team t-shirts and generally behave in such a way that would get them arrested under normal circumstances. And dedicate each of the last few kms to these people or any causes you care about.

## POST-RACE

**48** Put flip-flops in your post-race bag, or give them to a friend to pass to you at the finish line. They're heaven for sore, hot and blistered feet!

**49** Replace fluid and then re-fuel as soon as you can after the race. Listen to your body and if it says "Eat pizza", then you should obey those commands! Do some gentle exercise, walking or light swimming. Wear good-quality compression wear and try to keep your feet elevated for 15mins twice a day.

**50** Use a good body scrub to remove any race numbers or temporary tattoos (unless you want to keep them for bragging rights!). Now wear your finisher's medal to work/the pub/in bed, indulge in what you fancy and truly celebrate what you've achieved! **220**

