

Tips for a Healthy Triathlete's Body

written by
GLENN WITHERS



*Beyond
Mind
and
Movement*



Tips for a Healthy Triathlete's Body



For many of us starting out on the road to triathlon success our focus is on the physical challenge that lays ahead. If this is your first triathlon you may well be thinking solely about the three elements that make of the majority of the race – Swim, bike and run! Most likely you are focussing on the distances of these three elements and then thinking about your training and how you can manage the individual distances, let alone doing them all back to back on race day! From this standpoint it all comes down to your training, right?

Here are 2 crucial questions to ask yourself in your attempt to maintain a healthy Triathletes body:

Question 1 - Have you been able to create a training program that will allow you to deliver on the challenge that lays ahead.

Question 2 – Can you be consistent in your training?

The most important thing for you to focus on is **consistency of training**. A lot of beginner triathletes, and more experienced ones, have sporadic bursts of training load and then a break, be it enforced through injury or through time availability, family commitments or other matters. We must understand this constant battle on time and training and find a way of combatting it as best we can. The best advice I can give you is to find a way to carve out the time you need to complete at least 3 key sessions per week. 1 swim, 1 bike and 1 run. Find a way to do this at least every week in some capacity and you will be in a lot better shape come race day than a burst of intense training in the half term and noting for a few weeks after that!

Consistency of some form of training really is the vital ingredient in triathlon success. Of all the elements that may lead to a lack of consistency the one thing you can manage is the injury element of this. Triathlon as a sport has the great advantage of being a cross training sport, whereby the three elements allow the body to recover from one form of exercise by doing another. Think of it like this. Many athletes after a hard game, race or event head to the pool for a recovery session. Well for us triathletes we do that all the time and the pool session is a great way to keep the legs fresh. So, with some clever planning of your sessions you can aid the recovery process. Scheduling your swim session, the day after a long run is a great way to refresh the body through a non-weight bearing activity. This is much better than a rest day after your long run as this will only allow or the stiffness to settle in and then make it harder for you to get back into your training the day after your rest day!

That brings us to the issue of rest? Is it really good for us to have a full rest day, or is there something else we can do on the rest day to make our bodies feel good again and ready to keep



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training. Well, the thing that can tackle the recovery issue and the injury issue is that dreaded word...stretching!

Below is a sample stretching program you can do in just 10 minutes! Each element of the common issues facing a triathlete is addressed in this simple stretching program below. From the tightness in our lower back, our tight middle backs from long hours on the bike, our hips from the run and bike, to our side muscles from the swim. It's all here!

Do yourself a favour and stretch on recovery days, and at least 2 other days per week! Consistency in training comes from taking care of your body. Trust me, come race day you will be thankful your added stretching to the elements of swim, bike and run!

Additional tools for keeping your body injury free is to look to schedule in a massage at least 1 x per month. More if you can afford it. Many triathletes view a massage as a little luxury and often end up doing it the week before the race. Unfortunately, this is just not going to work. Regular soft tissue release is the key. If you cannot afford a massage try investing in a foam roller or massage balls (www.appihealthgroup/products). These nifty little pieces of kit can be amazing for the tight areas of your body is used correctly. There is a load of videos on YouTube on how to use them, or we have a full DVD on the foam roller for you to use at home (www.appihealthgroup/products/DVDs).

So, aim for some consistency in your training, schedule some stretching and soft tissue work into your schedule and hit the triathlon session with a healthy triathlete's body.

Check out my next blog for the 5 essential strengthening exercises for triathletes.

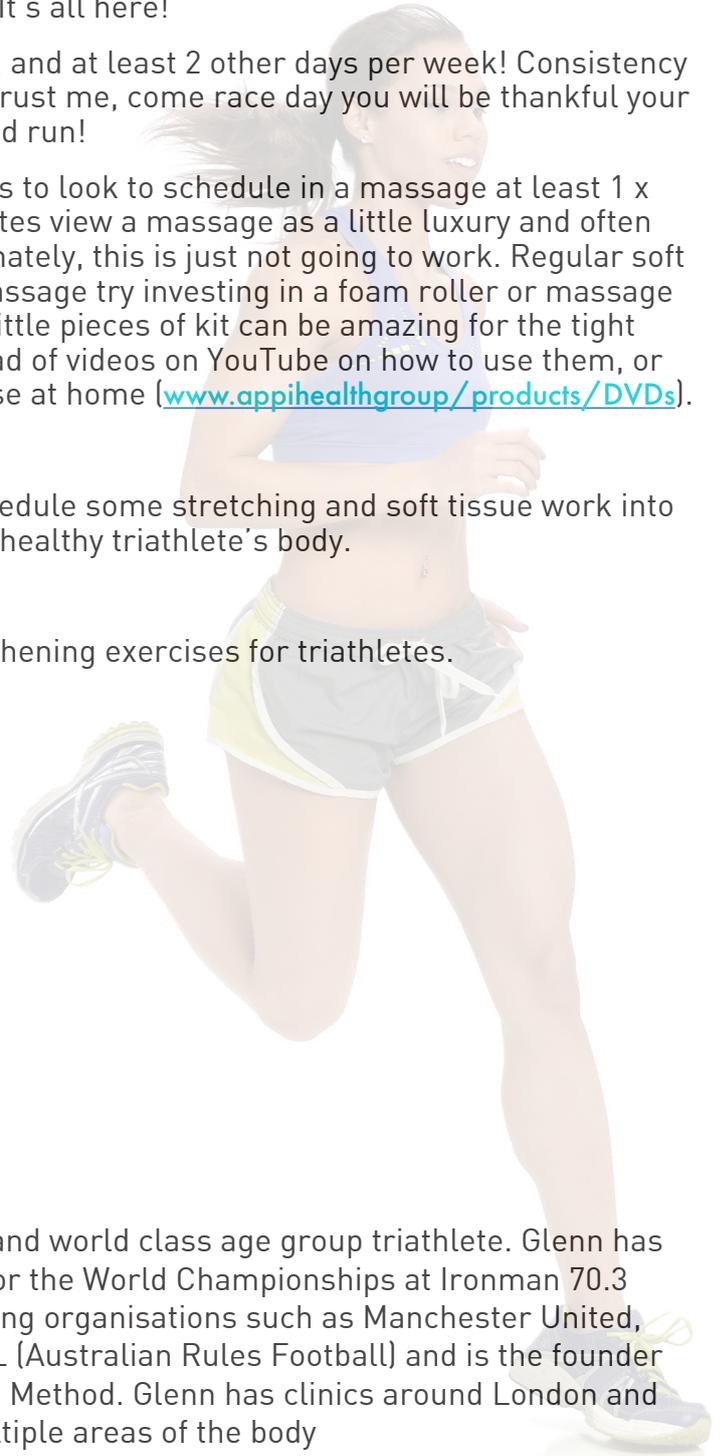
Good luck out there.



Glenn Withers

About the Author:

Glenn Withers is a world leading physiotherapist and world class age group triathlete. Glenn has qualified to represent GB at age group level and for the World Championships at Ironman 70.3 distance. Glenn has worked with many elite sporting organisations such as Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur, EIS, British Winter Sport, AFL (Australian Rules Football) and is the founder of the world renowned APPI Pilates Rehabilitation Method. Glenn has clinics around London and speaks internationally on the rehabilitation of multiple areas of the body



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Rotation

Aims:

- To mobilise and stretch the spine into rotation.
- Encourage relaxation and release of the thoracic spine

Alternative stretch position:

This exercise can also be done lying on a mat. See the start position in supine in the attached picture. Start with your arms out to the side and right knee bent. Lift the left arm to 90 degrees and right leg to table top. Slowly rotate the right knee across the body and place the left hand on the outside of the right knee. Ensure this is a lengthened rotation rather than just a collapse of the right knee to the floor.

Use your breathe and the contract relax techniques as detailed above.

Mobilise the thoracic spine and improve rotation and extension movements.



Lateral Flexion

Aims:

- To mobilise and stretch the spine into lateral flexion.
- Mobilise the ribcage
- Stretch latissimus dorsi, quadratus lumborum and the lateral line of the body

Starting Position:

Sitting on a chair as in the picture. Feet supported on the floor. Use a block under your feet if the chair is not at the adequate height. Open your legs and grip the underside of the chair seat with the left hand towards the opposite end of the chair. Relax the left shoulder onto the left thigh and try to relax. Feel a gentle stretch on the right side of the body. Breathe and Relax.

Action:

Maintain the position as in the picture. Ensure the left arm does not move. Focus on your breathe. Try to elongate your body and gently encourage a bit more side flexion relaxing the left shoulder into your left thigh. Slowly start to move your right arm across the body with the elbow bent pausing in each position dependent on the sensation felt. Work towards getting your arm totally overhead and eventually straighten the elbow. Reach the arm off the body and gently contract the areas where the stretch is being felt. Hold this position for a slow count of 5. Release slowly, but maintain the new position gained, then on the next exhale see if you can stretch even further.



Hip Flexor Stretch – Ilio-Psoas

Aims:

- Open the front line of the hip
- Stretch the hip flexors

Starting Position:

It is best to use a rolled-up mat under your leg as in the picture shown. Assume the low lunge dragon position. Your front foot should be placed slightly ahead of where the hands are placed on the floor. Ensure you square your pelvis and do a gentle tuck under at the pelvis. Allow the gluteals and abdominals to relax. Now hold this position and breathe and relax.



Action:

Maintain the position as above. Take an inhale and on the exhale use your hands to gently pull the body forward, like you are trying to pull yourself to the wall straight ahead of you. Hold this for a slow count of 5 and gently release. Allow the hip to sink a little closer to the ground.

The knee that is placed on the mat. Imagine you are trying to pull the knee into your chest. Don't allow any movement to occur. Hold this contraction for 5 slow counts and gently release. Allow the hip to sink even closer to the ground. Breathe and relax.

Hip Flexor Stretch – Rec Fem

Aims:

- Open the front line of the hip
- Stretch the hip flexors, mainly rec fem
- Improve hip extension



Starting Position:

It is best to use a rolled-up mat under your leg as in the picture shown. Assume the low lunge dragon position. Your front foot should be placed slightly ahead of where the hands are placed on the floor. Slowly come out of the position by lifting the buttocks and reach for the foot of the leg behind you with the opposite hand. Ensure you square your pelvis and do a gentle tuck under at the pelvis. Then slowly lower the pelvis to open the front of the hip. Allow the gluteals and abdominals to relax. Now hold this position, try to lengthen the spine and breathe and relax.



Action:

Maintain the position as above. Take an inhale and on the exhale gently push the foot you are holding into your hand. Don't allow any movement to occur. Feel the front of the leg working. Hold this for a slow count of 5 and gently release. Allow the hip to sink a little closer to the ground. The knee that is placed on the mat. Imagine you are trying to pull the knee into your chest. Don't allow any movement to occur. Hold this contraction for 5 slow counts and gently release. Allow the hip to sink even closer to the ground. Breathe and relax.

Hamstrings

Aims:

- Open the back line of the leg
- Stretch the hamstrings, semi mem, semi tend and biceps fem
- Improve straight leg raise



Starting Position:

Start lying on your back and pull one knee into the chest. Ensure you wrap your arm around the back of the leg and use your biceps to keep the chest and thigh connected. Straighten the opposite leg and push the back of this leg into the mat. See picture



Action:

Maintain the position as above.

1. Take an inhale and on the exhale try to straighten your knee and flex at the ankle. Imagine you are trying to kick a wall that is just above your head. Return to the start position. Make sure that the thigh does not come away from the chest.
 2. Lift your chest and straighten your knee. Reach a bit higher to the calf muscle and pull the leg in towards your chest. Then return to position 1.
- Repeat in sequence



Calf Muscles

Aims:

- Open the back line of the leg and stretch the posterior ankle and calf muscle
- Mobilise the ankle

Starting Position:

Standing at the wall. Elbows supporting the body weight and one leg placed behind in a stride stance position. You are stretching the back leg. Square the pelvis, gently tuck the pelvis under and try to do an external rotation in the hip on the leg you are stretching. Feel a gentle stretch in the calf muscle.

Action:

Maintain the position as above.

1. Take an inhale and on the exhale push the hip of the back leg towards the floor and drive the heel into the floor.
2. Imagine you are trying to lift the heel into the air and push your foot into the floor. Make sure there is no movement on the leg. Hold this contraction for 5 seconds and then gently release. Re square at the pelvis, re tuck, externally rotate the hip then on the next exhale push the hip of the back leg towards the floor and drive the heel into the floor even further.



Piriformis

Aims:

- Improve hip mobility
- Improve hip flexion and ability to do forward bend with less restriction



Starting Position:

Roll up 1-2 mats and sit with one leg on the mat. Ensure that the front leg has a 90-degree angle at the knee. Slowly move the other leg out to the side and then out behind you. Lengthen the spine and square the pelvis. Feel the gentle stretch into the piriformis. Continue attempting to lengthen the spine, square the pelvis and limber in this position for about 30 seconds.



Action:

Maintain the position as above.

1. Take an inhale and on the exhale push the side of the leg you are stretching into the top of the mat. Ensure no movement occurs and hold this for a count of 5.
2. Push the side of the foot in a sweeping like movement away from you into the floor. Ensure no movement occurs and hold this for a count of 5.

