Basic Rules for Triathlon Training

The scenario is a common one: The "weekend warrior" hobbles into the workplace on a Monday morning, injured in the pursuit of that triathlon goal or, ironically, health - only to endure gentle ridicule from sedentary colleagues. Sounds familiar, it certainly is in my chiropractic office on a Tuesday morning. The "warrior" goes out running at the weekend, "thinks" that a few extra miles won't harm him/her but will actually do them good for that all important triathlon race. This scenario is only too common and easily avoided if the individual would have followed a few simple rules when starting their training.

For many years I have rehabilitated and conditioned recreational and elite triathletes from a host of injuries that could have been avoided. A large majority of athletes don't realize that there is more to achieving true potential than just swimming up and down the pool, or in the sea, sitting on a cycle seat whilst the legs are spinning or pounding the roads whilst breathing in copious amounts of exhaust fumes!

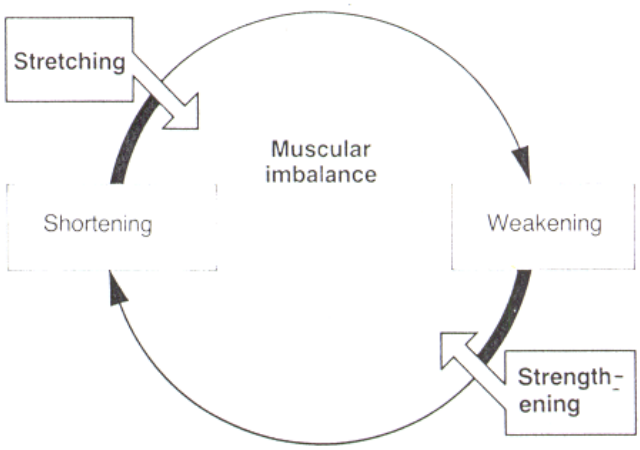
When I inform athletes that they must spend time in the gym with the "gym monkeys" and stop performing the activities that they are addicted to, the reply is too often "but I am a triathlete who must swim, cycle and run!". But my reply to the slight bemused and bewilded athlete is "That is right, but a Formula 1 car is not built on a track!!" So whether you are an elite or the "weekend warrior" triathlete the following rules apply when developing a training program. If these rules are broken or not adhered to then injuries will occur sooner rather than later, and that equates to spending time and money visiting a chiropractor/physiotherapist/osteopath that has extensive experience in rehabilitation or alternatively purchasing painkillers and/or anti-inflammatory drugs and contributing to a CEO's BMW fund of a pharmaceutical company. Personally I know which one I would rather choose because it doesn't cost me any money!

Rule 1 – Correct your posture

Unbeknown to many individuals poor posture is a major cause of ill health and affects you in more ways than you may think. The human body functions optimally from a position of balance and equilibrium. When in optimal alignment the musculo-skeletal system acts to prevent damage and undue stress to the more vulnerable internal organs of the body allowing for optimal and stress-free function.
From an evolutionary standpoint we are designed to stand or squat when eating or working and not sit down, designed to move whilst exercising and not sit down on resistance machines, designed to run and catch our food and not sit down and drive to Sainsburys. Today many individuals are operating from positions so far out of ideal that our body is literally breaking down under the strain, and they haven't even started training yet! For example did you know that poor postural alignment could cause?

- Arthritis
- Low back pain
- Digestive disorders
- Eye strain
- Endocrine/hormonal imbalance
- Fatigue
- Gastro-intestinal disorders
- Headaches
- Immune system disruption
- Joint pain
- Kidney and liver disorders
- Menstrual pain/disorders
- Muscle pain/strain
- Neck and mid back pain

- Respiratory problems
- RSI
- Sciatica
- Toothache
- Urinary/incontinence problems

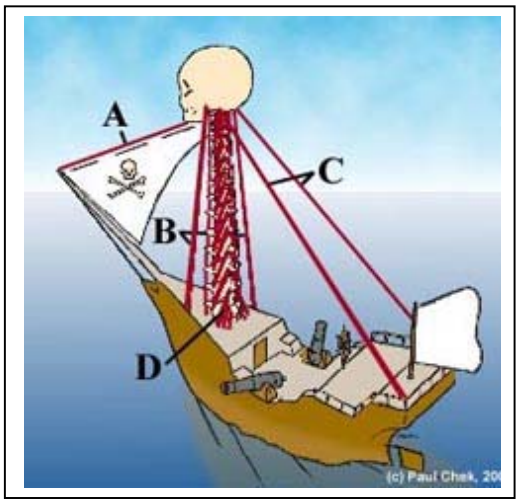


The majority of the above are seen on a daily basis in my chiropractic office. Yet many do not believe that their poor posture may be causing their pain. Couple this with individuals who perform repetitive movements, such as swimming, cycling and running, on a daily basis then a vicious cycle is being developed for a postural/muscle imbalance. Symptoms of many above only manifest in the late stages. You only know that your wheel nuts on your car are loose when you try to turn a corner!

Therefore, before you commence with any conditioning/training program it is essential that posture is assessed, by an experienced practitioner, and corrected with a **specific** stretching and strengthening program, not a program that is copied from a triathlon magazine or any other training/fitness magazine.

Rule 2 – Correct and develop stability

Muscles and ligaments of any joint especially the spine can be viewed as rigging on a mast. In order for the sail to fill with wind and to move the yacht forward the mast must be stable, and held in place by balanced staithes. Ever seen a round the world yacht whose mast is wobbly?



In order for any joint, such as ankle, knee, hip, lumbar spine etc, to work effectively the stabilizers of the joint must perform their function. If the stabilizers fail to work optimally pain is experienced. So when the "weekend warrior" limps into the office in pain, the brain switches off the muscles around the joint to protect it and stop the stupid "warrior" from using it. However, do they listen, probably not and go out training still in pain. This is a quick way of obtaining several weeks off work with an injury which results in reduced training days and never achieving their true potential.

In order for a runner to perform the swing phase of running the pelvis must be held still/stabilized by certain muscles, i.e. there must be a working foundation for the leg. Otherwise very little force can be generated. Ever tried to jump out of a canoe that wasn't anchored at the bow and stern? Pelvic stability is vital for running, otherwise numerous injuries may occur due to pelvic instability such as

- Over pronation
- Plantar fascitis
- Achilles tendonitis
- "shin splints"
- ITB syndrome
- Sacroiliac joint pain
- Low back pain
- Mid back pain

- Neck and shoulder pain
- Headaches

All of the above are common complaints from triathletes with pelvic instability.

Many magazines and internet sites often recommend to provide stability for the low back and pelvic region tighten the abdominals. I will show you why this is not good practice if you have any aspirations for achieving your true potential. Try this little exercise. Standing, take a large breathe, filling your belly and lungs with air, note how much air you can take in and then exhale. Now think you're looking in the bathroom mirror and tighten those abdominals, keeping them tight and take a big breathe. You should have noticed that more air was taken in during the first breathe. Therefore, if you tighten the abdominals, as advocated in some magazines, you are reducing your ability to breathe which will result in a decrease aerobic capacity, now that is **BAD** for an endurance athlete because he/she who can't ventilate cannot run that far!

Furthermore, research has shown that within 24 hours of low back pain, atrophy (wasting) of the lumbar spine stabilizing muscles occurs. Therefore if you have ever had low back pain and never sought any professional advice from an experienced and GOOD health professional in spinal rehabilitation, low back pain will always occur which may result in one or more of the above symptoms. Story sound familiar??

You are probably wondering, I suffer from or have had several of the above symptoms, what should I do?

1. Seek out and make an appointment with a GOOD health professional, one that has worked with triathletes, understands the demands of the sport and is able to correct posture/muscle imbalances with a specific stretching/strengthening program.
2. Undertake an assessment of the stabilizers of the body by an experienced and GOOD health professional.
3. Improve your posture and stabilizer systems of the body so it can handle the demands of your sport, a Formula 1 car couldn't handle the demands of the Lombard RAC Rally!
4. Reduce any activity that may be causing you pain and/or discomfort and seek advice from a health professional.
5. Change your everyday working/social posture to a more ideal posture.
6. Eat a variety of **organic** vegetables and meat, and cut out any processed food, which actually may result in low back pain (another article in itself!)
7. More importantly detour your training to the local gym preferably one with no resistance machines! (another article in itself), smile at the "gym monkeys", and improve your posture and stability. It is impossible to improve postural muscle strength and the stabilizers of the body by swimming, cycling or running.

If the above rules are adhered to, then your true potential is more likely.

If you have any questions or would wish to make an appointment with the highly experienced conditioning coach please contact Dr Simon Pumfrey (BSc, MSc, DC, CHEK II, NLC II) for a consultation at Well4Ever, Lower Richmond Road, Putney, telephone number 020 8789 4362, www.well4ever.com.