

the equipment question

Because this is her first triathlon, Ande Lowden isn't investing a great deal in special equipment.

Her bicycle will be her regular bicycle, a mountain bike but with slick tires substituted for the standard knobby type meant for rugged trails. If she likes triathlons, she said, then she'll consider investing in a quality road bike.

For someone like Lowden, who is just becoming acquainted with the sport, that's OK, doctors said, yet there are areas where one shouldn't skimp.

"The foremost among those is a good pair of running shoes," said Dr. Andy Peterson. People run differently. Some strike more on their heels, others may roll onto the inside or outside of a foot.

The way to avoid this danger is to visit a specialty running store, particularly one staffed by experienced runners or certified workers.

They can analyze your gait and then suggest shoes that fit. The worst option, he said, is to order a pair of shoes online with no opportunity to try them on, because as a rule if you feel comfortable in a pair of shoes, even without special analysis, chances are they fit your particular biomechanics well.

There's nothing wrong with using a mountain bike in a triathlon although it will probably demand more of your energy to move it than a specialty road bike costing \$6,000 or more. Second in importance behind good shoes is a bicycle which fits you well, Peterson said, because many injuries from cycling come from poor positioning. This isn't as critical for someone who rides a mountain bike only a few times each year; it's more important for endurance athletes who spend hours in the saddle.

"All good bike shops, when they sell you a bicycle, will fit you well on that bicycle," Peterson said. For the ultimate adjustment, which again applies mainly to people who are riding hundreds of miles each year in training or races, it may be worth visiting a custom bike-fitter. In Madison they charge about \$300 for a session, he said.

Equipment isn't very important in swimming. A wet suit is good for warding off cold water, and it provides some buoyancy, but it's not necessary, Peterson said.

"Swimming is a more technique-intensive sport," Peterson said. "Most people don't get a lot better just by swimming more."



Ande Lowden trains for a triathlon this summer.

the final word

Andrea Lowden has dropped those pounds, 20 so far with 10 more to her goal. Exercise is a way of life, she said, and it has helped her to feel better and has provided more energy for the other parts of her life. She is not doing the Danskin for any reason other than self-satisfaction.

"It's fun. I would encourage any woman to do the Danskin," Rowland said. Yet no one should take it lightly. "If you're a couch potato and then you want to do the Danskin, man you better be training."

In a sense, Dr. Scott Dresden said, our society is on two levels. One very high-performing group of athletes

has access to all the current science and techniques, and then there's everyone else. "We've got the most fit people we've ever had, and we've got the least fit people we've ever had."

Going to a sports medicine specialist can help as can educating yourself through reading, he said.

In the end, said Dr. Andy Peterson, there's one point: "The most important thing when entering a triathlon is to remember to have fun. People have a tendency to get hung up on the gear or their own personal results, but really it's important to remember that we do these things for fun."

EATING / Training

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going out for 30 to 60 minutes of exercise." Food should be consumed about three hours before an event, and it should be complex carbohydrates such as whole wheat pasta (high-glycemic foods, 1 to 1.5 grams per kilogram of body weight) which your body can gradually turn into the sugars it needs to power your cells.

Hydration is important, too. Two to three hours before the race, a triathlete should drink 16 to 20 ounces of water, followed by another 6 to 8 ounces 30 minutes before the start. If you're exercising or racing for more than 60 minutes, you need to drink something with carbohydrates to provide fuel for your cells.

"We encourage athletes to avoid straight water during the competition," said Dr. Andy Peterson. Water is absorbed more efficiently when it is accompanied by the proper proportions of salts and sugars. Too much plain water can dilute your body's own fluids which could result in seizures and cramping or even coma and

death.

Some commercial sports drinks now come with less sugar, and some are endurance formulas with added salt. If you find the commercial drinks still too sweet, it's acceptable to dilute them a bit so they're more palatable, although the effect isn't as great as in an undiluted drink, doctors said.

It is important to use in the race what you use in training, said Dr. Scott Dresden. "When you're pushing the body, there's no set way of knowing how someone's going to react to a certain sugar load or a certain flavor." Many events will supply certain products, so you should train with those in order to learn how your body reacts, he said, or carry your own supplies.

One can use food-planning Internet sites or books if you're the type of person who easily learns that information and can adapt it, Hoch said. But one hour with a specialist sports dietitian (someone with particular training in sports nutrition and exercise physiology) may be more efficient and worthwhile, she said.

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