

1. No training plan

Without question, this is the biggest mistake I see people make. They really have no plan for the year other than to “work hard.” They go out and do what they feel like that day. This approach leads to overtraining, inability to peak for key races and potential injury. “When you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there.”

2. Impatience

Once you develop a training plan or start working with a coach, you must give the plan time to work. You must do proper base development and not skip ahead to interval training. In my experience, you have to allow at least a year or two to get the full benefits from a training plan. Stick to it and let it work for you.



3. Lack of consistent training

The single best way to improve your performance in triathlon is to train consistently. I see many athletes take 4 months off after their last race and then start up again sometime in late winter or spring. It is hard to get better using this approach.

4. Not Setting Goals

Every triathlete should write down their goals at the beginning of the season. Tell friends, family, spouse, training partners, etc. ... what those goals are. This makes those goals real. Most people are afraid to stick their neck out in this way. By doing so, you are now committing to attaining those goals. Goals, however, need to be realistic and attainable to be of value.

5. Weak form and technique

There are three ways to get faster: 1) develop greater aerobic capacity; 2) develop greater strength; and 3) become more efficient. Most people ignore the third way to develop speed. However, focusing on form and technique in all three sports is the easiest way to get faster and also the best way to prevent injury. I call this “Free Speed.”

6. Not enough rest

The only time your body absorbs its gains from all your hard work is when you are resting. Most people keep putting in the same hours week in and week out. This leads to burnout and injuries and greatly slows your development. It is essential that you schedule recovery time into your training plan.

7. Not practicing the way you race

Doing well in a triathlon requires mastering a lot of skills. However, I see too many triathletes wait until race day to practice those skills. Triathletes need to swim in open water, practice all transitions, practice 180 degree turnarounds on the bike, do bricks, fix flats and derailed chains fast, and practice race day nutrition. It also means practicing for a certain type of course. If the race course has big hills on the bike, practice big hills on the bike. Finally, you need to be mentally prepared to race. This includes going over every possible contingency, deciding what you will do if it happens and then practicing it. The list goes on and on.



8. No Regular Testing

The only way you can know for sure that your training program is working for you is to perform regularly scheduled verifiable and repeatable tests. By holding all factors constant and repeating the test the same way each time under the same conditions, you can measure improvement objectively and frequently.

9. Too much racing

It is physically and mentally impossible to be at your very peak best for every race you do. Choose your races carefully and with some discrimination. You don’t have to do every race. Too much racing leads to both physical and mental burnout.

10. Not using a heart rate monitor, powermeter or GPS

These devices are the triathlete’s best friend. They are your silent training partner making sure you do your easy workouts easy and your hard workouts hard. Without them most athletes tend to train in the “gray zone” which greatly slows their progress and development. Furthermore, by collecting objective workout data it makes it much easier to analyze your data and work with a coach.

