

10 Performance Tips from Chrissie Wellington



By Marty Munson

When it comes to hitting your peak performance on triathlon race day, Chrissie Wellington knows a thing or two. Wellington has won the prestigious Ironman World Championship race in Kona for the past three years in a row. And Shape.com caught her on her way to her flight to Hawaii for her fourth attempt on October 9.

Of course, you don't have to be training for a peak performance in triathlon to get the most from Chrissie Wellington's top 10 tips. Use them any time you want to be at your best.

Performance tip #1: Passion gets you further than gear.

"You've really got to be passionate and enjoy the sport and never lose sight of that. Amateurs sometimes get caught up in the minutia. You've got to have the latest bike and this, that and the other thing. You have to keep the love for the sport in mind."

Performance tip #2: More isn't always better.

"There's always a tendency to think that more is better, especially with regard to Ironman training. People think, 'I have my log book and I have to be a slave to it and log as many hours as I can.' Whereas for me, people are always surprised that I don't do as much volume as they think. Don't get me wrong; I work incredibly hard. But always err on the side of quality rather than quantity."

Performance tip #3: Don't be afraid to go fast.

"Lots of people go for long, slow, steady rides. If you ride long, slow and steady, you're going to race long, slow and steady. You have to go faster, harder and stronger in order to reach those faster times. There's a place for periodization and for not doing too hard of intervals too early in the season. But as race season starts, you want to change it up. There's still a place for those slow miles, but you also have to incorporate harder, faster efforts as well."

Performance tip #4: Rest is as important as training.

"Recovery is an integral part of training. People have their log books, and they tick everything off in all of the columns, but where's the column for recovery? That's the 4th pillar. Without that, the whole structure collapses. I break recovery down into nutrition, compression garments (which I wear), getting enough sleep, and resting between sessions. Also learning not only to relax your body but also relax your mind. **Without recovery, I wouldn't be the athlete I am.**"

Performance tip #5: Train your mind, too.

"It amazes me how little time people spend on mental training. 30K into a marathon on race day is too late to figure out that you need to train your brain. There are many different tools you can use. Have a bank of positive images and songs. It doesn't have to be related to sport at all. That way, when the going gets tough--and it will get tough--you can draw on those images and have peace of mind."

Performance tip #6: Have a mantra (or two).

"I have some that I write on my water bottle and wristband when I race. One is 'smile,' and another is 'never give up.' There's a poem I write on my water bottle--Rudyard Kipling's *If*. It encapsulates everything you need to do to be a good athlete, especially the mental side of the game. 'If you can keep your head when all about you/Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;/If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,/But make allowance for their doubting too...'

It's all about keeping calm under pressure and knowing that triumph and disaster are one and the same thing. You can win or lose, and often losing can be just as much of a learning experience as the victory can. Someone said to me in an interview the other day, 'You've never lost an Ironman; what would it feel like to lose?' And I think, is coming in second losing or is it coming in second? It's changing the concept of success and failure, triumph and disaster."

Performance tip #7: Make it hurt.

"It's important to hurt in training and to learn to suffer a bit. Embrace fatigue and pain--welcome it and develop strategies to embrace it. If it doesn't hurt, you're not working hard enough. You're not always going to have easy days in training--you're going to be frustrated and have a bad day and it's important to learn to endure those in training. When you experience it in a race, you've already encountered it and can have that peace of mind."

Performance tip #8: Develop a deep understanding of your own body.

"People say how do you know how fast to go? I've trained at that pace I know I can sustain for X number of hours. Whether you train with a power tap or heart rate monitor or another device, that's all well and good, but you need to be able to control your own effort and your own intensity and internalize that race pace so when you get onto the course you know what pace you can sustain. When everything's hurting 30K into the marathon, no heart rate monitor is going to help you."

Performance tip #9: Get stronger by getting smarter.

"You have to be prepared to be objective and honest about weaknesses and where you can improve and learn from your mistakes. That's how you grow."

Performance tip #10: Eat!

"I eat a really healthy, well-balanced diet. I think it's important for women that they have role models who consume a sizeable amount of calories each day. Nothing is naughty or banned for me; I eat sensibly and healthfully. I eat red meat once a week and have lots of good fat and lots of carbohydrates. I fuel my body, and that's an integral part of my training."

Bonus performance tip: Race for something that counts.

"I'm uber-competitive and I don't make apologies for that. I love racing other athletes, and I wanted to race them on the best stage of the world [Kona]. I love the atmosphere, the camaraderie, and the thrill of winning. But when I first got into the sport, I said to my coach at the time, Brett Sutton, 'I feel so selfish, I'm doing this for me alone.' He said, 'within a few years, you'll be able to affect more change through your sport than you ever thought possible.' And it's true: I'm not just racing for myself I'm racing for a cause, for women in sport, to spread awareness and inspire and encourage people. I don't just want to win. I want to win in a manner that affects change but in a way that shows my passion and my love and inspires others."