

8-WEEK NOVICE TRIATHLON PLAN

A structured first block for someone new to triathlon who can already swim, cycle and run a little, but hasn't trained across all three together. No specific race is targeted — the goal is a **confident, consistent aerobic base** and a finish that's noticeably fitter and more comfortable in the water, on the bike, and on the run than the start.

THE APPROACH

Easy first, hard later. The first two weeks are entirely easy effort — no intervals, no “training stress,” just time in the water/saddle/on feet and getting technique right. Real intensity is introduced gradually from week 4, once that aerobic habit is in place.

Consistency over heroics. Progression comes from repeatable weeks stacking up, not one big session. Load builds to a peak in week 6, backs off in week 7 so the body absorbs the work, then week 8 proves the progress.

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- **Smart watch** (or phone app + optional HR strap) — every session is logged by time and effort; week 8 compares directly against week 1 on the same metrics.
- **Turbo trainer** — covers at least one weekly bike session, both through autumn/winter when daylight and weather make outdoor riding unreliable. Move both outdoors in summer.
- Pool access, a safe running route, and a bike in working order.

HOW EFFORT IS MEASURED

Everything is prescribed by **RPE — Rate of Perceived Effort, 1-10** — a novice won't yet have a tested threshold to train off. Heart rate is logged throughout as a cross-check, but RPE is what to train by. **This plan never asks for more than RPE 6-7.**

RPE	FEEL
2-3	Very easy — full conversation, barely breathing harder than normal.
4-5	Easy-moderate — comfortable, could hold a conversation in sentences.
6-7	Moderately hard — breathing noticeably harder, only short phrases possible.

WEEKLY PATTERN

Mon	Rest — full rest, light mobility only	Fri	Swim
Tue	Swim	Sat	Bike — the week's long ride, building from 60 to 90 minutes
Wed	Bike (turbo)	Sun	Run — longer
Thu	Run		

Anyone new to structured exercise, or with any underlying health concerns, should check with a doctor before starting. Rest days are part of the plan, not optional extras. Technique comes before pace in the swim throughout. Stop and reassess any session that produces pain — not the ordinary discomfort of effort.

Week one is deliberately unspectacular. Every session sits at **RPE 2-3** — full conversation pace, nothing to chase. The only job this week is showing up six times, getting comfortable with the smart watch, and locking in technique before any effort gets added. Tuesday's swim, Wednesday's bike and Thursday's run are the three sessions repeated exactly in week 8 — however easy they feel today, the watch is quietly taking a baseline.

WEEK ONE · ZERO INTENSITY · JUST SHOW UP

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

RPE 2-3 means RPE 2-3 — not “easy for me.” If any session tempts a faster pace because it feels too easy, that's the plan working, not a sign to push. The whole 8 weeks is built on this base being genuinely easy, so the intensity that comes later actually means something.

Mon

REST

No training today. Light stretching or a walk is fine, but nothing structured — the first of seven weekly rest days this block is built around.

Tue

SWIM

Technique Swim

Short reps with plenty of rest between. Long strokes, relaxed breathing — pace doesn't matter today.

20 min · RPE 2-3 · technique focus

Baseline session — repeated exactly in week 8.

Wed

BIKE

Steady Spin (Turbo)

Get comfortable on the turbo. Steady cadence around 85-90rpm, nothing forced.

30 min · RPE 3 · cadence 85-90rpm

Baseline session — repeated exactly in week 8.

Thu

RUN

Easy Jog

Walk whenever needed — this is about time on feet, not pace.

20 min · RPE 2-3 · walk breaks welcome

Baseline session — repeated exactly in week 8.

Fri

SWIM

Continuous Swim

First unbroken swim of the block, still fully easy. Stop and rest whenever needed.

25 min · RPE 3

Sat

BIKE

Long Ride — Week 1

The week's long ride, and the start of a progression that builds to 90 minutes by peak week. Flat route if possible, steady effort throughout.

60 min · RPE 2-3 · flat/steady

Sun

RUN

Easy Long Run

Easy, flat, relaxed finish to the week.

25 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · 0 structured intensity · ~3h00 total

Effort: everything RPE 2-3 · long ride 60 min

The approach: pure aerobic base. Tuesday's swim, Wednesday's bike and Thursday's run are logged as this block's baseline — week 8 repeats them exactly.

Week one's habit is in place — six sessions banked, no drama. Week two holds the same zero-intensity approach but stretches every session slightly longer, and adds the first technique drills in the pool and on the bike. Still nothing hard. The aerobic base being built here is what makes week four's first intervals worth doing.

WEEK TWO · STILL EASY · DURATION OVER PACE

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

Longer isn't harder. Every session this week is still RPE 2-3 — the extra minutes should feel like more of the same easy effort, not a step up in difficulty. If a session starts to bite, that's a sign to ease off, not a sign it's working.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue**Drill Swim**

Catch-up drill and kick-only lengths, then easy continuous swimming to finish.

25 min · RPE 2-3 · technique drills

Wed**Steady Spin + Cadence Drills**

Steady effort with a few minutes of single-leg pedalling if comfortable — smooths out the pedal stroke.

35 min · RPE 3

Thu**Easy Run**

Relaxed pace throughout, no walk breaks needed if last week felt fine.

25 min · RPE 2-3

Fri**Continuous Swim**

Straightforward continuous swim, still fully easy.

30 min · RPE 3

Sat**Long Ride — Week 2**

First slightly longer or rolling route if one's available — five minutes longer than last week.

65 min · RPE 2-3

Sun**Easy Long Run**

The week's longest run, still fully conversational.

30 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · 0 structured intensity · ~3h30 total

Effort: everything RPE 2-3 · long ride 65 min

The approach: same zero-intensity base as week 1, with duration nudged up across every session and the first technique drills introduced.

Two weeks of pure easy volume are in the bank. This week introduces the first pickups — brief, easy changes of pace, not intervals — just enough to remind the legs what a faster cadence feels like before week four's first real intensity. Nothing here should feel like work.

WEEK THREE · LIGHT PICKUPS · WAKING THE LEGS UP

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

A pickup is not a rep. The 4×50m swim build and the run strides should feel gently faster, not hard — if breathing changes noticeably, that's too much. These are a warm-up for next week's intensity, not this week's intensity.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue

Drills + Easy Build

Technique drills, then 4×50m easy build — each 50m gently faster than the last, no strain.

25 min · RPE 3-4

Wed

Steady + Cadence Pickups

Steady ride with 5×1min at a slightly firmer cadence (RPE 5), full easy recovery between each.

Main 5×1min RPE 5, full easy recovery between

35 min · incl. 5×1min RPE 5

Thu

Easy + Strides

Easy running with 4×20sec relaxed strides — gentle pickups, not sprints — full walk/jog recovery between each.

Main 4×20sec relaxed strides, full recovery between

25 min · incl. 4×20sec strides

Fri

Continuous Swim + Sighting

Continuous easy swim, adding basic sighting practice — lifting the head to spot every 6–8 strokes.

30 min · RPE 3

Sat

Long Ride — Week 3

Rolling terrain if available — the legs should be ready for a bit of variety by now.

70 min · RPE 3

Sun

Easy Long Run

Easy long run, flexible on the top end depending on how the legs feel.

30-35 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · light pickups only · ~3h35 total

Effort: RPE 2-3 base, brief RPE 4-5 pickups

The approach: the first deliberate changes of pace, kept short and easy enough that next week's real intervals feel like a natural next step, not a shock.

This is the week the block has been building toward — the first structured, controlled-hard session in swim, bike and run. **RPE 6-7 is as hard as this plan ever asks for**, and it's introduced carefully: short reps, full recovery, technique protected throughout. The aerobic base from the last three weeks is what makes this sustainable rather than a shock to the system.

WEEK FOUR · FIRST REAL INTERVALS · RPE 6-7

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

RPE 6-7 means moderately hard, not maximal. Short phrases should still be possible — if a rep leaves no breath to speak at all, ease back next time. **Technique always wins over effort**: if form breaks down, especially in the water, back off immediately.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue

First Swim Intervals

Warm up easy, then 6×50m at RPE 6-7 with 20sec rest between each. Technique comes first — effort should never break form.

Main 6×50m @ RPE 6-7, 20sec rest between

30 min · incl. 6×50m RPE 6-7

Wed

First Bike Intervals

Warm up, then 5×2min at RPE 6-7 with full easy recovery between each.

Main 5×2min @ RPE 6-7, full easy recovery

40 min · incl. 5×2min RPE 6-7

Thu

First Run Intervals

Warm up, then 5×1min at RPE 6-7 with 1min easy jog recovery between each.

Main 5×1min @ RPE 6-7, 1min jog recovery

30 min · incl. 5×1min RPE 6-7

Fri

Easy Recovery Swim

Deliberately relaxed continuous swim after Tuesday's intensity — nothing to prove today.

30 min · RPE 3

Sat

Long Ride — Week 4

Longest ride of the block so far, steady effort throughout.

75 min · RPE 3

Sun

Easy Long Run

Easy long run to close out the week's first intensity block.

35 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · first structured intervals in all three disciplines · ~4h00 total

Effort: RPE 2-3 base, RPE 6-7 in three sessions · long ride 75 min

The approach: the first genuine intensity of the block, kept short and well-recovered so it builds confidence rather than fatigue.

Last week's first intervals are in the bank without any lingering fatigue — a good sign. This week holds the same RPE 6-7 dose rather than pushing it further, and adds the first **brick session**: bike straight into run. That transition — legs feeling heavy and strange off the bike — is worth practising early, before it matters.

WEEK FIVE · HOLD THE INTENSITY · FIRST BRICK

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

The brick isn't about pace. The 10-minute run off Saturday's ride will feel odd no matter how easy the effort — that heavy-legged feeling is completely normal and gets less noticeable with practice. **RPE 2-3 the whole way**, same as any other easy run.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue**Swim Intervals**

Warm up, then 8×50m at RPE 6-7 — two more reps than last week, same effort.

Main 8×50m @ RPE 6-7

30 min · incl. 8×50m RPE 6-7

Wed**Bike Intervals**

Warm up, then 6×2min at RPE 6-7.

Main 6×2min @ RPE 6-7

40 min · incl. 6×2min RPE 6-7

Thu**Easy Run**

Fully easy — no intervals today, just recovery volume.

30 min · RPE 2-3

Fri**Continuous Swim**

Continuous, easy.

30 min · RPE 3

Sat**Long Ride + First Brick**

Steady ride, then straight off the bike into a 10-minute easy run — the first practice at running on bike legs.

Bike 80 min steady, RPE 2-3**Run** 10 min easy, straight off the bike

80 min bike + 10 min run · RPE 2-3 throughout

First brick session — the heavy-legged feeling off the bike is completely normal.

Sun**Easy Long Run**

Easy long run.

35-40 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · intensity held, not increased · first brick · ~4h15 total**Effort:** RPE 2-3 base, RPE 6-7 maintained in swim/bike · long ride 80 min + 10 min brick run**The approach:** consolidate last week's gain before the peak — same intensity dose, first taste of running off the bike.

The biggest week of the plan. Every session steps up slightly — longer swims and runs, harder intervals, the longest ride of the block at 90 minutes, and a longer second brick. This is the week the last five weeks of consistency get spent. Next week backs right off, so it's worth giving this one everything it's built for.

WEEK SIX · PEAK WEEK · BIGGEST SESSIONS OF THE BLOCK

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

Peak doesn't mean maximal. RPE 7 is still the ceiling — “peak” here means the most volume and the longest intervals of the block, not a step past controlled-hard into all-out. **Recovery starts the moment this week ends**, so there's no need to hold anything back.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue

Peak Swim Intervals

Warm up, then 10×50m at RPE 7 — the most reps of the block.

Main 10×50m @ RPE 7

35 min · incl. 10×50m RPE 7

Wed

Peak Bike Intervals

Warm up, then 6×3min at RPE 7 — longer reps than any previous week.

Main 6×3min @ RPE 7

45 min · incl. 6×3min RPE 7

Thu

Peak Run Intervals

Warm up, then 6×1min at RPE 7 with 90sec recovery.

Main 6×1min @ RPE 7, 90sec recovery

35 min · incl. 6×1min RPE 7

Fri

Longest Continuous Swim

The longest unbroken swim of the block — settle in and hold a steady rhythm.

35 min · RPE 3

Sat

Peak Long Ride + Brick

The block's peak long ride, hitting 90 minutes, then straight into a 12-15 minute easy run.

Bike 90 min steady, RPE 3**Run** 12-15 min easy, straight off the bike

90 min bike + 12-15 min run · RPE 3

Sun

Longest Run of the Block

The longest run of the plan, fully easy throughout.

40 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · highest volume and intensity of the block · ~4h50 total**Effort:** RPE 2-3 base, RPE 7 intervals · long ride 90 min + 12-15 min brick run**The approach:** the peak of the block — every session at its longest or hardest before a deliberate step back next week.

After six weeks of building, volume drops by roughly 30% across the board this week. This isn't falling behind — it's the week the last six weeks of training actually turn into fitness. A touch of intensity stays in, just enough to keep things sharp, but nothing this week should feel demanding.

WEEK SEVEN · RECOVERY · A DELIBERATE STEP BACK

THIS WEEK'S FOCUS

Recovery weeks are not optional extras. Skipping the volume drop here undermines exactly what the previous six weeks were building toward — the fitness gain happens during recovery, not during the peak week itself. Trust the taper.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue

Easy Swim + Sharpener

Mostly easy, with a short 4×50m at RPE 6 just to stay sharp — nowhere near last week's volume.

25 min · incl. 4×50m RPE 6

Wed

Easy Spin

Fully steady, no structured intervals this week.

30 min · RPE 3

Thu

Easy Run

Short and easy.

20 min · RPE 2-3

Fri

Continuous Swim

Continuous, easy.

25 min · RPE 3

Sat

Easy Ride + Short Brick

Noticeably shorter than the peak — a deliberate dip before the final week's push.

60 min bike + 8 min run · RPE 2-3

Sun

Easy Run

Easy, relaxed.

25 min · RPE 2-3

This week: 6 sessions · 1 rest day · volume down ~30% on week 6 · ~3h15 total

Effort: RPE 2-3 base, one short RPE 6 sharpener · long ride 60 min

The approach: absorb six weeks of load. Reduced volume, intensity kept light, ready for a strong finish.

The final week repeats week one's Tuesday swim, Wednesday bike and Thursday run at exactly the same effort — RPE 2-3, nothing pushed. The point isn't to go faster on purpose. It's to notice, at the same perceived effort the block started with, how much more ground gets covered now. Finish with the longest brick of the plan — the first time everything comes together.

WEEK EIGHT · PROGRESS CHECK · SAME EFFORT, WATCH THE NUMBERS**THIS WEEK'S FOCUS**

Don't chase a number. The instruction for Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday is identical to week one: same RPE, same structure. If pace comes out quicker or heart rate lower without trying, that's the eight weeks talking — forcing it defeats the point of the comparison.

Mon

Full rest.

REST

Tue**Progress Check Swim**

Identical structure and effort to week 1's Tuesday swim — RPE 2-3. Compare the numbers afterward.

20-25 min · RPE 2-3

Repeat of week 1's Tuesday session.

Wed**Progress Check Bike**

Same steady RPE 3 effort as week 1's Wednesday ride. Compare average speed and cadence.

30 min · RPE 3

Repeat of week 1's Wednesday session.

Thu**Progress Check Run**

Same easy effort as week 1's Thursday run. Compare pace at the same RPE.

20 min · RPE 2-3

Repeat of week 1's Thursday session.

Fri**Continuous Swim**

Relaxed continuous swim — notice how much easier this now feels than week 1.

30 min · RPE 3**Sat****Celebration Brick**

A full rehearsal at the block's peak 90-minute distance — easy ride straight into an easy run. The longest brick of the plan, and the first time swim, bike and run fitness all show up in one session.

Bike 90 min steady, RPE 2-3**Run** 15-20 min easy, straight off the bike**90 min bike + 15-20 min run · RPE 2-3****Sun****Closing Run**

A relaxed run to close out the block.

30-35 min · RPE 2-3**This week:** 6 sessions · 1 rest day · three sessions repeat week 1 exactly · ~3h55 total**Effort:** RPE 2-3 throughout · long ride/brick 90 min + 15-20 min run**The approach:** prove the block worked. Same effort as week 1, measurably better output — sit down with the numbers side by side and see it.