



Triathlon race guidelines

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Every triathlon is different; from big World Series events, through highly branded well-known names, to small, local events with a community vibe. But what is the same with all these events, is that women deserve to be on the start line, to have a fair, equal and safe experience during the race, and to feel that their performance is valued before, during and after.

We want to empower more women to enter the world of triathlon racing, but more than that, we want to see more women who already compete in triathlon to challenge themselves to progress to more difficult events, to longer distances and in more varied environments while feeling welcomed and supported to do so.

We've put together a set of detailed guidelines for race directors at triathlon events to help support all female athletes, based on our research and the contributions of hundreds of female athletes, as well as key industry figures. Not all guidelines will be relevant to all events; small Super Sprint triathlons will be very different to a mountainous long-distance event. Many races won't be able to put in place everything that we suggest, depending on their resources, size of organisation and scale of event, but we want to raise awareness of what's possible and the difference that even the smallest of changes can make to women's participation rates.

However, most of our guidance will apply for all races, such as the diversity in marketing images and equal race coverage. And many of our guidelines apply to all participants; men also benefit from on-course support, support for novice athletes and those in the back end of the race, and cultural and religious considerations like prayer spaces for longer races.

There are other considerations that triathlons can also make to increase female, as well as overall, participation. For example, given that cost is clearly a sizeable barrier to many, having a generous, interest-free payment plan can help with affordability, as can having a discounted rate for groups and clubs to enter together. Another option could be to have basic entry options without medals, t-shirts etc, at a lower price, which benefits the pockets of athletes as well as the environment.

Events could also offer affordable and safe equipment hire options, so that kit and equipment need not be a barrier towards participation. The hard work of Fund Her Tri UK tackles some of these issues, encouraging women into the sport in the first place – see the Afterword of this report for more.

At SheRACES, our concern is that when women go on to decide to enter an triathlon, they have an experience that makes them feel valued and safe. We already have our existing race guidelines, which outline the minimum requirements for races to be considered inclusive to women. It comes down to just **8 key commitments** that are already in effect in many events globally through our efforts to great success, plus a commitment to review these annually to ensure continued compliance. We also have elite race guidelines for those events where there is an elite women's field.

Races that consistently meet our requirements and show true inclusivity towards women in their sport can apply to become SheRACES accredited and be listed on our website. Women already use our accredited races database to select events that they know they will be welcome at, increasing entries and participation. We provide more information on SheRACES accreditation at the end of this report.

These guidelines build on the SheRACES race guidelines with triathlon-specific advice and best practice, covering the unique nature of multi-discipline events.

1. Get more women on the start line

Overall, female participation at triathlons is in the region of 25- 40% globally, but this number decreases as the distances involved increase. The appetite to race longer events is there – women want to sign up to more challenging races, but they need the confidence to do so.

This confidence is bred from the very beginning, with diverse marketing to show women that they belong and clear logistical information so that they can plan ahead and make arrangements. There should also be guidance around important race details, such as the course, expectations and facilities.



Diverse imagery

Women need to be able to imagine themselves on the start line. This begins with diverse imagery, showing that women are welcome and encouraged to join in. Marketing imagery should include a wide range of athletes, including diversity in sex, race, body type, ability and so on. Not all races have access to diverse imagery because they do not yet have diversity in participation. In these cases, consider developing marketing and outreach initiatives to actively promote triathlon events in underrepresented communities.

Collaborate with local organisations to engage women of colour and other minorities. This will increase diversity on the start line and in race photography, social media content and ambassadors that can then be used going forwards to further widen participation.

Clear commitment to inclusivity

If you are inclusive to women, make it clear from the outset. Women shouldn't have to hunt down information that proves they are welcome. Our research shows that 84% of triathletes would be more likely to sign up for an event that committed to equitable and inclusive treatment of women. Our accredited races usually have a separate SheRACES page on their website outlining their commitment to these guidelines; otherwise, a page dedicated to inclusion that is visible on the website is necessary.

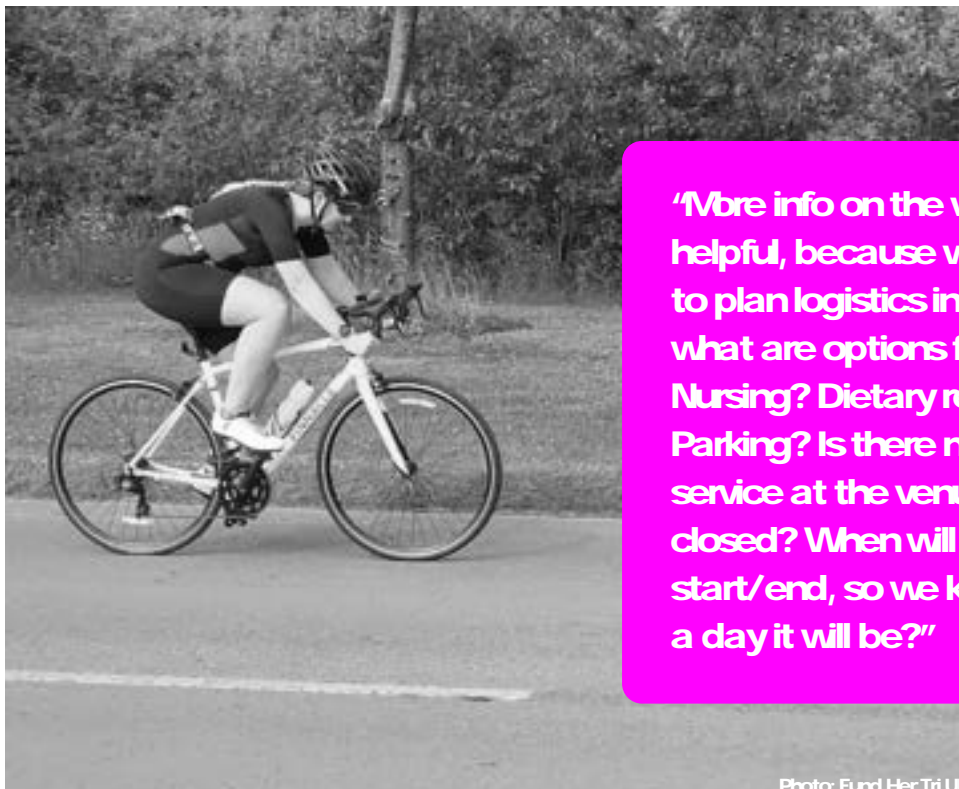
Ensure that things like pregnancy deferrals are easy to find, and actively encourage women to get in touch with any questions or requests for specific requirements, for example a breastfeeding area, breast pump storage or a prayer space. Offering an equal experience for all athletes benefits everyone, men and women.

Planning – around the race

Triathlons typically have more planning than a single-discipline race. There is more equipment to consider, longer timescales to plan around and travel plans to attend bigger events. Ensure that information is clearly available to enable women to feel comfortable outside of the race environment.

This includes things like the logistics of how to get to the event, considerations around extra costs – for example, very early starts can mean factoring in a hotel stay – and the timings of public transport, which may not always be available at the right times.

Minimise additional costs to athletes where possible, for example by offering on-the-day racking (as opposed to needing to rack the day before), or offering shuttle services from easy-to-reach locations.



“More info on the website is helpful, because we often have to plan logistics in advance. Eg, what are options for kids? Nursing? Dietary restrictions? Parking? Is there mobile (cell) service at the venue? Are roads closed? When will awards start/end, so we know how long a day it will be?”

Race logistics

Ensure that key race logistics are easy to find and comprehensive. This includes course maps with descriptions, cutoff times with what pace is needed for each section, what waves are available, the likely water temperature, what facilities are available, the mechanics of the event, what support is available and answers to common questions about 'what happens if..?'. Ensure that those coming to the event for the first time, or expect to be towards the back of the pack, feel supported and comfortable to enter. Consider offering free training plans or signposts in the direction of them; bear in mind that women often have more time constraints due to caring responsibilities and training plans offered should be realistically achievable.

- **'If I feel like [the event] is not interested in making sure that mid- and back-of-pack folks are also valued/supported, then for longer races (full especially) I'm not confident going in.'**

Generous cutoffs

Cutoffs are a genuine concern for many would-be and experienced triathletes, and are a barrier to participation. While cutoffs are important for the safety of all participants and the logistics for race organisers, unnecessarily strict cutoffs can penalise women, who are, overall, slower than men. Ensure that cutoffs for all participants, especially those with later start times, are as long as feasibly possible and also ensure that women do not have shorter cutoffs than men based on their start waves. Generous cutoffs also encourage more participants in general, across the board, by enabling slower athletes to feel comfortable entering the race.

Fair pregnancy deferral policies

Women should not be penalised for having a baby, and should feel comfortable to return to racing when it's right for them. The lack of clear and easy-to-find deferral options can prevent women from entering an event in the first place, but it can also force women to race before they are ready if they don't want to have to give up a hard-earned race place. It's not just a financial decision when it comes to returning to racing too soon, but an emotional one too. Women should have clear options that enable them to make decisions based on their own body and the time it needs to recover. We advocate for a deferral policy of a minimum of two years, or a refund, ensuring women can return to racing when they're ready.

- **"I did look at the policy and thought it would be unlikely I would get a refund either. I decided to race the event 8 weeks pregnant."**

- **"I would love to sign up for 70.3 Sunshine Coast & Busselton, but when asking about a refund due to pregnancy I have had no response."**

- **"The cancellation terms did not include pregnancy or baby loss. I am trying for a family and many of the expensive races do not give refunds for these reasons. I can't know months in advance if I can compete."**

2. Give women a better experience

In order to give the best triathlon experience possible for all, it's important to look at events from a female perspective.

Toilets and changing facilities

Women have different needs to men. It's clear from our research that having female-specific toilets and changing facilities is incredibly important to women who want to take part in events - even those who have not faced barriers. There should be appropriate toilet facilities at the start and finish, and at relevant points on course for longer events.

Period products should be easily available in toilets and on aid stations - women can't always know when they're going to need these products, and carrying them themselves is a hindrance to their race. Single-sex changing facilities enable women to feel more comfortable at the event, and also consider whether there is a need for private changing areas in transition for those with cultural requirements around public changing. All these facilities should be sufficient for the race field and well marked, as well as clearly communicated in advance.

"Race falls when I'm due my period and there will be no toilets in transition, so if I come out of the swim feeling like I need to change my tampon... tough! I'm stuck like that for the bike and run."

Consider flexibility in rules for cultural needs too, such as allowing swim caps to stay on until within a changing area for those who need to keep their hair covered or not requiring race tattoos on bare arms where skin cannot be exposed, and ensure that all volunteers and marshals in the areas are aware of this so that they don't cause unnecessary distress to participants.

Equal fit kit and race accessories

Unisex fit t-shirts and kit are not unisex. They are male fit, and this doesn't always fit a woman's body. If you are going to provide t-shirts at all, and we always encourage races to offer an opt-out for sustainability, then they should be offered in unisex and female fit, ensuring that these are ordered in advance so all athletes receive the correct size.

If t-shirts are provided, ensure that a size guide is provided upon entry so women can make the right selection. Everything else provided in goody bags at the finish line should also be equal and appropriate for both sexes. Swim caps should be offered in different sizes to accommodate all hair types, and it should be clear that these are available and how to change sizes.

Consider the size of race bibs too; overly large numbers can be uncomfortable to race in. SheRACES' research shows that the largest recommended bib size is 21cm (length) by 15cm (height).



Consider race start timings

Where possible, offer both a mass start and female-only waves, as well as self-seeding. Women (and men) who are more comfortable in a mass start will choose this one, and participants can self-seed based on their own swim ability, or join a female-only start wave, which can also be self-seeded.

Consider also the timings of waves and when different waves will meet in the water, as this can have a huge impact on a woman's ability to race. For example, faster men being set off after slower or older women, which can result in those men pushing through or intimidating women; and faster women starting off after the slower or older men, making it harder for them to maintain their race pace and space, comprising their right to a fair race.

Also consider the size of each wave; a rolling start may be more appropriate. Ensure that there is visibility on parts of the course where more novice athletes may need more support or feel less comfortable. Think about the experience of all athletes, including those at the back of the pack who deserve equal support.

"Races need to remember the last 20% are still racing too! We aren't just mobile obstacles. Packing up around us is heartbreaking!"



Photo: Fund Her Tri UK

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“Started ALL men first and then let all women go two minutes later. The faster females didn't have a chance trying to get around the beginner slower males in the water. Put females at a big disadvantage.”

“Timing of setting off women's waves. After older men's age groups we are held up and the swim/bike is congested, forcing us to do lots of overtaking. But equally starting further ahead we don't want lots of male powerhouses chasing us down. I would prefer seeded start waves at appropriate times within the men's field. Or a completely different time – an hour separate at least to allow a wider spread of athletes and everyone to perform their best.”

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Set expectations around behaviour and safeguarding

Our research shows that harassment at events is a common issue for female triathletes. While this is not down to the events themselves, race organisers can impact how other athletes behave and set expectations around conduct, as well as put strict safeguarding protocols in place.

This includes clear policies outlining expected behaviour, as well as penalties for those who exhibit poor behaviour – which must be followed through on. Codes of conduct should be obvious and accessible to all competitors on the race website, along with any repercussions, and not hidden away in terms and conditions. Consider making all athletes acknowledge and agree to a code of conduct regarding expected behaviour as a condition of entry to an event. Educate all volunteers and marshals on conduct and behaviour, as well as providing training on safeguarding.

Give women a clearly communicated way to contact race support with concerns around the behaviour of other athletes, and encourage women to speak out about bad experiences so that they can be addressed.

Also, encourage male competitors to support female participants and call out poor behaviour when they see it. Provide guidance to male athletes about how their behaviour on course can impact others, as they may not be aware of how their actions can affect female participants.

This can include things like assumptions that a female competitor is less capable, making inappropriate or offensive comments or jokes, aggressive behaviour, running or cycling too close to a female participant, comments around a woman's body, ability or pace, uninvited touching or hugging and giving unwanted attention to another competitor.

Be a good example of the behaviour and conduct you expect by exhibiting it as a race organiser at all times. This means ensuring inclusive language in all race communications and during race briefings (remembering that both men and women are present, and avoiding stereotypical gender-based assumptions), training volunteers to spot poor conduct, and being visible during the event to address any problems that crop up on course.

- **"At IMCascais, the whole of the athlete briefing assumed that all competitors were male: 'don't sleep with your wife, sleep with your chip', 'you won't be able to go to the IM merchandise store during the race, but give your wife your credit card and send her' and 'follow the fellow in front'."**

- **"Have strict rules (and repercussions) about the way participants communicate to each other."**

- **"Educating male athletes on how intimidating they can be, especially on the bike."**

3. Equally value our race

Remember that in every event, there are two separate competitions – the women's and the men's. We just race together. Women deserve to have their race recognised and valued, especially in triathlons where there's not the distinct split on the start line that we might otherwise see in other single-discipline events, for example.

Attract elite female athletes equally

If there is funding available for male competitors (including things like free race entries, funded accommodation and travel, participation fees for elite athletes, etc), make sure that there is an equal pot for women. Ensure that this is communicated clearly, and actively seek elite competitors to take part to expand the depth of the field.



Give us room to race

Ensure that all participants have space on the start line with clear visibility – this enables us to watch the female competition as easily as the men's. With badly timed starts or mixed waves, the women's competition can get caught up within the men's, making it hard to differentiate or see how the race is progressing. Competitive female athletes vying for a podium position should not be held up by the slower end of the men's competition. Enable all women to have the chance to perform at their best. Having women visible also means more imagery of the female competition available for the media and race coverage, further confirming that women are welcome and respected.

- **"I have been put off several races as they pack too many competitors in and it becomes drafting – this is terrible as a competitive female as other females often draft men either by design or because they can't see a way out."**

- **"In mixed Open & Age Group qualifying races, they often put the women qualifiers after all the men, including Open categories. However, many of the women, even my AG, are faster than a lot of the men in open waves. This means we get held up. It's unfair, shows a bias against women and a thinking that all men are faster than all women."**

- **"Providing an elite wave allowing women competing for front-of-pack placement to have open space to race without interference from middle/back-of-pack men."**

Equal race coverage

Any discussion of the race – before, during or after – should include equal reference to the women's field and result as the men's. This includes race previews, highlighting equal male and female competitors, as well as tracking and commentary during the event. Ensure that results posted online are split so that the women's results are separated out from the men's/open classification.

This makes it easy to see the female podium, rather than it being lost within the overall. Apply equal coverage to all social media posts, interviews and analysis.

Equal celebrations and prizes

Where prize money or other rewards are offered, it should be equal for men and women, with the same size podium and same number of age group categories. Awards should also be of equal value and suitability, and post-race celebrations should be equal for men and women.



"No recognition of age group podium winners. Being older, it is unlikely for a 50+ year old to win an event outright – and only outright winners get recognition, which means only the younger women get recognition. Why?"

Photo: Fund Her Tri UK