

➔ **Running**



➔ **Cycling**



➔ **Swimming**



Continue reading at next page >



# INTERVIEW WITH A TRIATHLETE

Featuring Dr. Kathleen Crowley

**Dr. Crowley is a Velocity veteran and avid triathlete. She took the time to answer a few questions that the Your Velocity team thought would be helpful as you set out to train for Velocity Day on October 3, 2021. Read the whole interview below!**





**Q: Tell us a little bit about you, how you got involved with Velocity, and why you participate each year.**

**A:** My first Velocity was in 2018 and to this day I recall the excitement I felt to participate in a bicycling event with my colleagues across CUIMC and raise money for cancer research and comprehensive care. I have been able to continually partake including the virtual Velocity in 2020. I participate because I can, because I am able, because Cancer has and will continue to touch all our lives. Cancer (melanoma, prostate, lung, colon, gastric, pancreatic and renal) has impacted my family – my father, my mother, my sisters, my nephew, my brother-in-law. Cancer has impacted my dearest friends. Cancer has impacted my professional colleagues. It makes me proud to participate because every dollar we raise through “Your Velocity” goes directly to the lifesaving research and care at Columbia’s Cancer Center!

**Q: When and how did you begin training for triathlons?**

**A:** A Triathlon refers to a race that consists of three disciplines completed back to back: swimming, cycling and running. My first triathlon was a “Sprint” in 2015. A Sprint is a great first step to start as it is the shortest of the 4 types of triathlons. This format is half the distance of an Olympic, and consists of a 750 meter swim (½ mile), 20km bike (12.4 miles) and a 5km run (3.1 miles). As a first time triathlete, it can be surprising how difficult the sprint can be because it is an “all-out” event. There is also a “Super Sprint” which is a slightly shorter race consisting of a 0.4km swim (0.25 mile), 10km bike (6.2 mile) and 2.5km run (1.5 mile). In a triathlon, the race begins upon water entry and doesn’t end until the run finish line. During an event

there are two transitions: T1 where the swimmer doffs the wetsuit and dons their biking shoes and helmet; and T2 where the biker doffs their shoes and dons their running shoes.

While I have always been athletic, mostly a runner who liked a leisurely bicycle ride, I was ready to set some new goals and a new challenge. I set a goal to “try” a triathlon as I was keenly interested to learn a multisport event. For my first triathlon I “borrowed” everything – a friend’s wet suit, their triathlon bike, and then set-out to train. I also surrounded myself with a positive influence, a friend who had previously competed in triathlons. This kept the momentum for my training. Subsequently several of my “runner” friends joined and the following year participated in their first triathlon. This first experience inspired me to train for an eventful next season as well as to invest in a wetsuit and a good road bike. I recognize that I enjoy the “cross-training” as well as developing a strategy to execute an event, including the nutritional aspects. Most will tell you that the swim is the hardest as it is technique driven and takes time to learn to swim efficiently. It can also be the most mentally challenging, as swimming is usually done in open water which can be cold and dark.

**Q: Which triathlon event is your favorite?**

**A:** I enjoy the multisport, the cross training and the preparation. Each event has its challenges, and all have the common elements of the open water coupled with a picturesque bike and run course. The triathlon community is very sociable, triathletes are wonderfully supportive, and I can enjoy the sport with my own family and friends. Depending on





the type of triathlon, the time commitment for training can be demanding with long rides and runs occurring on the weekend. The next level up from a Sprint and the most common triathlon is the Olympic, with a standard distance of a 1.5km (0.93-mile) swim, 40km (25-mile) bike, and a 10km (6.2 mile) run. The third triathlon type is a “Long-Course” or Half-Ironman, a lengthier mileage (70.3 mile), and requires serious physical activity. This distance includes a 1.9km (1.2 mile) swim, 90km (56 mile) bike, and a 21.1km (13.1 mile or half marathon) run. The fourth and longest distance triathlon (140.6 miles) is the full Ironman which following a 3.8km (2.4 mile) swim includes a century bike ride (112 mile) and a full marathon (26.2 mile).

**Q: What is one useful piece of advice you have for anyone looking to add more exercise into their daily life?**

**A:** When considering an exercise program or new sport, it is important to start slow, progress slowly and build a base with a focus on the cardiovascular system. Consider your fitness goals, create a balanced routine, and build activity into your daily routine. Plan to include different activities, set a target and workout accordingly. Grab a friend or family member to join you in your exercise, knowing that others are relying on you to show up for an exercise session can be a great motivator. Make exercise fun! Use exercise as one of your daily goals to improve your mental health.

If you are specifically considering triathlon training, begin with doing at least four weeks of a cardiovascular exercise two to three times a week. As a first-time triathlete, start doing two swims (in the pool), two bicycle rides and two runs per week. The longer

he event, the longer the training. Training will progress to include “bricks” - a workout that includes two disciplines, typically swim-to-bike or bike-to-run. In trying to prepare your body to know what a triathlon feels like, whenever possible you want to swim first, then bike, then run. Workouts should be interspersed with strength and flexibility exercise training such as yoga or TRX (total body resistance). Mental preparation is equally important as physical health including visualization, focus, and positive self-talk. If you “think you can” you are probably right!

**Q: What are some key tips for safety training during the heat of the summer months?**

**A:** Hydration, hydration, hydration are critical for any exercise or training, especially during the summer months (don't wait until you are thirsty to drink). Intense workouts should include electrolytes! Plan an early-morning or late-evening workout. Always have a buddy. Dress to stay cool with light-weight, loose-fitting clothing to help sweat evaporate, wear a hat and use sunscreen. Listen to your body's warning system, dangers include: heat cramps/muscle spasms (early warning), heat exhaustion (e.g., dizziness, vomiting, cold/clammy or hot/dry skin, chills or goosebumps, fatigue), and heat stroke a medical emergency (e.g., absence of sweat, body temperature over 104 degrees F, flushed skin, disorientation). It is important to pay attention to the weather forecast and heat alerts, this includes a forecast for thunderstorms. If you are accustomed to exercising indoors or in cooler weather, it is important to acclimate (one to two weeks) to allow your body to adapt over time. Certain medical





conditions or medications can increase the risk of a heat-related illness. Talk to your health care provider about precautions.

**Q: What are your post-exercise routines/suggestions to help prevent excessive muscle fatigue and soreness?**

**A:** Each time you exercise, begin with a 5-10 minute warm up. Start off slowly and gradually increase the workout intensity levels. Upon completion of the exercise, take the time to cool down for another 5-10 minutes and consider a foam roller and stretching. In addition, on rest days do light exercise such as going for a walk. Following exercise, rehydration is essential for post-workout recovery and muscle repair. Replenishing fluid levels improves flexibility, builds strength, and prevents soreness. A recovery drink is one that has a good source of protein, carbohydrate and electrolytes. Believe it or not, chocolate milk (good combination of carbs to protein) can also be a good recovery drink. It is important to eat well each day to provide energy to your working muscles. This can be accomplished with a daily balanced breakfast and a varied combination of carbohydrates, proteins and fat at each meal. Ideally eat within 30-60 minutes of finishing the activity.

The use of a cool bath, even an ice-water bath, to cool off the muscles may decrease and prevent soreness. Massage helps to prevent delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) by encouraging an increase in blood and lymph flow. An increase in blood flow provides worked muscles with oxygen for an increase in energy and nutrients for muscle fiber repair. Reflexology is another form of bodywork that can be helpful for maintaining wellness. It involves the application of pressure to specific points on the

hands and feet to produce changes in pain and other benefits elsewhere in the body.

Following a work-out that may make your muscles scream, it is important to keep your body moving, something light and gentle, which can also make you feel better. If after 48-hours, your muscles are still achy, try heat and apply carefully e.g., the use of a warm (not hot) towel or heating pad. Heat stimulates blood flow to the muscles to ease tightness, however avoid direct contact with any heating device.

**Q: How do you stay motivated to keep training while managing your various other responsibilities?**

**A:** Finding time to balance work, home and exercise is about knowing what may be best for you and your schedule. Get a good night sleep and prioritize making time for yourself. When committing to a healthy lifestyle, regardless of encountered obstacles, one can find creative opportunities to make it happen by setting goals and taking action. Finding a buddy, partner, family member, or group to exercise with can be a great motivator. One is more likely to stick to an exercise plan when they share it with those they are closest with. It is helpful to find something that makes training fun and enjoyable. Keeping an exercise log and periodically reviewing the entries can serve as a positive reminder of the hard work.

To balance work and exercise: schedule a workout before work, switch up a lunch-time routine to squeeze in a workout, connect with a fitness-minded colleague, bring gym clothes for an after-work session, or join a 24-hour gym. Reward yourself.





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**Q: What is one piece of advice somebody gave you about training that you'd like to pass on to the rest of the Your Velocity community?**

**A: This is your training, your exercise, your event. Pace yourself, build yourself up, have patience. Feel good at the finish. Make exercise a habit - it is all about the journey!**

**Thank You Dr. Crowley!**