

PSU Triathlon Club – A Primer on Triathlon Wetsuits

A typical Pennsylvania or other Northeast triathlon allows the use of [triathlon wetsuits](#) because of the potential for cooler water temps. The ability to use a wetsuit introduces a new gear dynamic to the equation, and like bikes or other tri gear, there can be much to learn about using a triathlon wetsuit. Below are a tips for triathlon wetsuit use, aimed at those new to the sport or simply seeking a quick refresher.

When To Use a Triathlon Wetsuit

Water temps below 70 are ideal for triathlon wetsuits, and water temps between 70-78 are up to the racer's or race director's discretion. Above water temps of 78, the conditions can actually be too warm for a wetsuit and it could cause you to overheat. Race distance is also a factor, as in longer races are more conducive to the benefits of a wetsuit than shorter ones. Because of the time to put on and take off a wetsuit, for extremely short swim legs (1/3 mile and less,) a wetsuit can actually be an unnecessary hassle. For most races, though they are definitely worth considering.

Advantages of Using a Wetsuit

There are several reasons someone would consider using a triathlon wetsuit. First, it creates a thin membrane of warm water next to the swimmer's skin that keeps the body warm in colder water. This is probably the primary reason for using a wetsuit. Second, a wetsuit helps the triathlete be more buoyant in the water. The thin layer of air/water in the wetsuit gives it some flotation qualities, almost like a pull buoy would. Because of this, many first-timers or people uncertain of their swim abilities feel more confident in a wetsuit especially when in choppy open water. Third, a good triathlon wetsuit can increase your speed, a little like how a tri bike can make you faster when you cycle. The engineering of higher-end wetsuits creates more of this effect as it helps your glide and can even more your swim stroke more productive.

How a Wetsuit Should Fit

As with many types of triathlon gear, the fit of a tri wetsuit can be very personalized to the particular swimmer. Reading through [triathlon wetsuit reviews](#) can help you understand which wetsuits work best with which body types. The wetsuit should be snug but not constrictive. A wetsuit that fits too loosely will not have the insulating or speed properties that you are seeking, but a wetsuit that is too tight will often give you a restricting feeling in the chest and shoulders – a bad feeling when you are trying to swim through open water. A wetsuit that is just right for you will be snug enough to have a good, trim fit while at the same time giving you the range of motion in the upper body to have a comfortable shoulder reach and the ability to breathe normally. Because sizing of a wetsuit is so individualized, it is best to buy your own (if you have the money) rather than borrowing from someone who might be a different size.

Putting on Your Wetsuit

Putting a wetsuit on can be a breeze once you get the hang of it. First, start with a dry suit and body, as putting on a wet wetsuit can be a hassle. Make sure there aren't any sharp objects around, as sticks, bike shoe clips, fingernails and toe nails have all been known to tear a wetsuit. Many swimmers like to apply some body glide to help with the putting the wetsuit on. Wetsuits can also chafe, so the body glide in general is a good idea when using one.

Put each foot through the leg holes, and then gently pull, pull, pull steadily until you have enough excess to put your arms in. Make sure there is enough of the wetsuit over your torso so it is not pulling down heavily on your shoulders, and do some stretching to make sure you have the range of motion you need. Zip it up or have someone zip it for you, and secure the zipper cord in a place where you can easily reach it upon exit from the water.

Removing the Wetsuit

Taking the wetsuit off can be a little harder than it looks, coupled by the fact that in a race you are fatigued and dizzy as you exit the water. A simple three-step process can work great for removing the wetsuit. First, reach back and unzip the suit as you are running out of the water. Second, peel off the suit down to your waist and continue your run to your bike like this. Once you get to the bike, finish the job by pulling the legs out one at a time. Don't tear the wetsuit, but also don't be afraid of stepping on it to aid in the removal once you have part of it off. Remember to leave it out of the way for you and other triathletes who will be coming through the area.

In short, triathlon wetsuits have some incredible engineering in them and can really help you in practice and in a race. Finding the right one and using it well can maximize the benefits of getting a triathlon wetsuit, and ensure it will last a long time.