

# Health & Family

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## And just what is triathlon?

"It's been around since the '70s," said Drew Surinsky, founder of niceguytraining.com in Glenview. That would be triathlon, which, he explains, is a series of three successive events in long-distance swimming, bicycling and running.

Californians picked up the habit first, training with masters track and swimming groups for adults.

The whole triathlon lifestyle with hard-core adult athletes reached its terminal mass with the Iron Man Triathlon in 1978, a very long race completed in 17 hours.

Surinsky laughingly terms triathlon as the "special olympics for the chronically self-absorbed, but not everyone is an addict," he noted.

Through the '80s, the sport held steady to satisfy serious athletes living a multi-sport lifestyle. In the '90s, more accessible races were offered at shorter distances, so triathlon became training for regular people with average genetics who had to work.

For Surinsky, there are a lot of pieces to triathlon: The right intensity, volume and duration. It appeals to people who like to solve puzzles, who like challenges. "Training doesn't need to be that high volume," he pointed out, "but you do need to lose a lot of calories."

Most people do OK especially if they have a coach and training group to check in with, because it's a social thing in a positive way.

"I've gotten people who've only exercised moderately, some in their 80s," Surinsky said. The oldest iron man finisher, indeed, was in his 80s.

Surinsky advised approaching triathlon like any exercise program that includes health screenings. "Start where you're at and build gradually," he said, "When bodies are challenged the right amount, they improve."

Simply put, "Stress a body and it will adapt -- too much and you'll get sick and injured," he said.

Northbrook's Wayne Arner's kind of weight-loss/high fitness success comes infrequently, said Marie Pearson, group fitness director at Five Seasons Sports Club. "I've seen maybe 10 to 15 people drop a lot of weight, but less than a handful have gone from near-couch-potato to triathlon competitor."

Success of this kind is far from foreign to Surinsky, who is also affiliated with TogetherWeTri triathlon group. "It's not easy, but it's definitely possible and requires a lot of commitment and patience, as well as a sense of humor," he emphasized.

For Surinsky, using good nutrition and exercise is good practice. "It seems that triathletes succeed in this regard more than others," he said, possibly because of triathlon training's tendency to distribute exercise stress more than a single discipline does.

-- **Mary Graham**