

**“It’s ok,  
I’m a triathlete”**

Common mobility issues amongst triathletes and why you shouldn’t ignore them



We decided to highlight a few areas where triathletes are notoriously tight or restricted in their movement.

**ISSUE: ANKLES**

**Tight Achilles / Tight Calves / Poor range of motion through ankles**

**IDENTIFIED:**

When squatting you are unable to get into a good range without leaning forward, weight is in your quads and your heels lift.

**Why will this cause us problems in our triathlon performance?**

Poor ankle flexibility is a common problem that we see in triathletes across the board; this is a result of countless hours of their feet being held in a semi-fixed position in their cleats and then being asked to run for long periods of time. The focal point of both of these disciplines is our ankle, knee and hip joints. As a result of constantly working in these positions, the tissues

surrounding the joints only work in specific ranges of motion and thus neglect the full and healthier range. Tight muscles through the lower limbs and especially your calf muscles will only get tighter until eventually niggles and injuries start to appear in and around the Achilles and plantar fascia.

Developing good ankle flexibility can also help with producing an effective kick in the water. Having adequate mobility to ‘plantar flex’ (point your toes down) will help create a strong force against the water while maintaining the correct body position. The tighter your ankles are, the more you have to adjust your leg position to kick, which creates more drag and therefore slows you down.

**EXERCISE TO IMPROVE:**

**SQUAT MOBILITY** – This is a simple and effective drill that you can perform on a daily basis - all you need is a secure upright structure to hold onto. Using your arms for support, lower yourself down into a ‘working squat’ position, keeping your heels on the ground. From here I want you to spend 20-30 seconds at a time working the angles of your joints, shifting your weight from side to side, all with the aim of improving the range of motion through your ankles, knees and hips. Take your time with this and build up your ‘time under tension’ over the next few weeks.

TEXT BY KRISS HENDY / STRENGTH FOR ENDURANCE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHUTTERSTOCK.COM AND KRISS HENDY

I recently watched a short documentary on Mat Fraser. For those of you who aren’t familiar with him, he is currently classed as ‘The Fittest Man on Earth’ (at the time of writing this article). He also happens to be a CrossFit athlete.

Now, before you roll your eyes and turn the page, there is something that stood out to me during his documentary that we can all learn from. Fraser like many of us (regardless of the sport or standard) physically pushes his body to its limits on a daily basis. But there is one big difference between him and the majority of athletes I come across. During his rest days (usually once a week) he spends anywhere from three to nine hours stretching and rolling. That basically means he sits on his living room floor for a whole day - rolling, stretching and mobilising. Working hard to realign

tissues, improve the range of motion through his joints and releasing tight areas.

Okay, so this is an extreme example, and very few of us would have the time, let alone the motivation to give ourselves this much attention. But whether you’re a CrossFit lover or hater, we cannot ignore the fact that this athlete is at the top of his game, and it’s habits like this that keep him there, session after session, day after day, competition after competition.

If we compare this to the level of attention most of us give our bodies, well there’s just no comparison. No, we’re not lifting heavy weights, flipping tractor tyres or doing endless ‘muscle-ups’ but the majority of us are training once or twice a day, causing repetitive muscle damage and suffer from chronic tightness through areas such as our ankles, knees, hips and lower back.

Athletes like Fraser and (the more familiar) Jan Frodeno are known for addressing their weaknesses by finding solutions and working hard to resolve them. We’re not saying that you need to spend nine hours a day stretching and rolling, but if you want to improve, or at least stay in one piece for years to come, you do need to stop ignoring the signs and symptoms that are so glaringly obvious. Being more mindful for a few minutes a day, at the beginning or end of a session could make a huge difference to your race day next race and next season; not to mention overall health.

We decided to highlight a few areas where triathletes are notoriously tight or restricted in their movement. We discuss why this will cause issues if ignored and show you how to start making improvements with minimal time and effort.

**Ankles**  
- Squat mobility



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## Back/Shoulders - Band Passovers



**ISSUE: BACK/SHOULDERS**

**Tight Upper back/ Poor shoulder mobility**

Without generalising too much, a high percentage of triathletes who I've worked with have a noticeably underdeveloped upper body, especially those who come from a running background. Those with a cycling background often have strong arms but weaker upper back and hold poor postural positions because of a rounded back and weak core muscles. Along with modern day living encouraging a forward rounding of the shoulders and lots of time spent in the aero position, mobility can become an issue for performance.

**IDENTIFIED:**

Poor stroke technique or limited range of motion in the shoulder joints identified by the band pass over drill.  
**Why will this cause us problems in our triathlon performance?**  
Those athletes who have restricted range of motion in their shoulder joints will certainly not be as efficient as they could be. Restricted range of motion in the upper back and shoulders will have a significant impact on a triathlete's performance. In swimming, it can prevent you from maintaining an effective reach and adequate body position. On the bike, your riding position can become compromised due to discomfort and the inability to hold

a sustained 'aero' position. Similarly, a poor posture will affect the efficiency of your run, due to a closed chest position, which will affect your breathing.

What's key to remember is that triathletes do not need to have 'big shoulders', but they do require a certain level of strength in their chest, shoulders, arms and back muscles. Equally, in running, there is a certain level of upper body strength required to maintain trunk stability and to hold a strong running gait throughout your run.

**EXERCISE TO IMPROVE:**

**BAND PASSOVERS**

**Tip:** Stand in front of a mirror; shrug your shoulders as you raise your arms overhead. Do your arms pass over smoothly and evenly?

**Kriss Hendy**  
Strength & Performance Coach

Seeing the need for better athlete education and understanding with regards to Strength & Conditioning for the Endurance Athlete. Kriss works with a variety of athletes from Age Groupers to Professionals, developing programs that support and heighten their endurance performance. Kriss is based in Byron Bay with his wife (Professional Triathlete) Polly Hendy. He has both a local & International client base that use his Online Strength Training Packages.

For further details or to contact Kriss:  
[www.khstrengthandperformance.com](http://www.khstrengthandperformance.com)  
Twitter: khendy3  
Instagram: @kriss\_hendy



## Hips/Lower Back T-Spine Lunge



**ISSUE: - HIP/LOWER BACK**

Our pelvis, lower back, core and hip musculature is the focal point responsible for a lot of our athletic performance. While hip mobility allows healthy movement, this area like others also needs to be strong and stable. An athlete who has poor hip mobility and lacks strength will never achieve their true potential. The consequences of poor hip mobility and stability can translate well away from this area and cause a whole host of niggles and injuries throughout the body.

**IDENTIFIED:**

Lower back pain.  
**Why will this cause us problems in our triathlon performance?**  
The Hip complex should be a priority for all athletes as this is the powerhouse and

centre point for all three disciplines. Good hip mobility coupled with good core strength is needed for an efficient transfer of force when swimming, riding and running. The inability to effectively flex and extend your hips will certainly comprise the way you kick your feet in the water, drive your drive legs on the bike and lift your feet while running.

**EXERCISE TO IMPROVE:**

**T-SPINE LUNGE**

If you are tight through your back, this will take time so be patient. **AT**

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