

Field Tests

The purpose of field tests is to evaluate your fitness level and monitor your progress. More specifically, field tests help us estimate your lactate threshold (LT) and correlate it with heart rate. Knowing your lactate threshold heart rate allows us to set your heart rate zones. These heart rate zones are an important tool for regulating the intensity of your training.

Your lactate threshold heart rate differs according to the activity. For this reason, triathletes need to do separate tests for swimming, biking, and running. Since your lactate threshold heart rate varies by sport, you will therefore have different heart rate zones for each sport.

Field tests involve high-intensity exercise. For this reason, it is advised to forgo any field tests until you have first established some baseline training. If you have any risk factors for coronary artery disease—e.g. family history, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, sedentary lifestyle—you should consult with a doctor. Regular medical checkups are always a good idea for anyone, even experienced athletes.

Two types of field tests:

- **Graded exercise test.** In a graded exercise test, the workload intensity is increased in incremental steps until you can no longer continue to increase your effort. The heart rate is recorded along the way. In addition, your rating of perceived exertion may be recorded as well as your ventilatory threshold (VT); this is the point at which your breathing becomes labored. Generally speaking, an athlete will not be able to continue for more than five minutes after reaching lactate threshold.
- **Short time trial.** A short time trial of 20 to 30 minutes in duration can also be used. A fairly flat course should be chosen so that a consistent effort can be maintained over the distance. The time trial is performed at race intensity. In other words, the athlete should have nothing left at the end of the effort. The test can also take place in an actual race situation, e.g. a 5K road race. Your average heart rate over the duration of the time trial is recorded. You should also note your perceived exertion level.

It is best to conduct field tests after an easy training day or a rest day. Remember, the purpose of these tests is to simulate race intensity and gauge your current fitness level. This is hard to do if you are coming off a hard training day. Typically, these tests will be scheduled at the end of rest and recovery weeks in your training plan.