Open Water SwimSmart: Top 10 Checklist
An open-water swim in a triathlon is substantially different from swimming in a pool. To alleviate stress, it's important that you arrive on race day healthy, fit and prepared. Here's a top-10 checklist to help get you ready.

1. Prepare for Race Conditions

- Race day should not be your first open water swim. Make sure some of your training replicates real race conditions, including water temperature, proximity to other swimmers and wearing a wetsuit if needed.

2. Race in Shorter Events

- Being properly trained is the best way to reduce anxiety. If possible, race in shorter events and clinics to prepare yourself for open water conditions.
- For extra guidance, talk to a coach or your local triathlon club.

3. Learn About Course Details

- It's important to prepare yourself mentally as well as physically prior to race day. Thoroughly review the race website and pre-race communication to familiarize yourself with the course.
- Keep in mind, every body of water is different, so you'll need to educate yourself on water current and surf conditions.
- Study the event timetable to plan for proper arrival and preparation.

4. Ensure Heart Health

- As an athlete in training, you should take the proper steps to assess your health with your physician.
- The American Heart Association suggests a 12-step screening process for competitive athletes. This includes a physical exam as well as an assessment of your family history and personal heart health.

5. Pay Attention to Warning Signs

- If you experience chest pain or discomfort, shortness of breath, light-headedness or blacking out while training, consult your doctor.

6. Don't Use New Gear on Race Day

- Focus on controlling as much as you can on race day.
- You should never race in equipment you haven't trained in – this is not the time to test new gear.
- Make sure your wetsuit fits properly and that your goggles, swim cap and other accessories work properly.
- Prepare for the unexpected with backups of all your gear.

7. Warm Up on Race Day

- Arrive early enough on race day for a proper warm-up prior to the start, preferably in the water.
- If you aren't able to warm up in the water, spend between 5 and 10 minutes getting loose.
- Be sure to do some cardio activity, such as a light jog, to increase circulation and prep your muscles.

8. Check Out the Course

- Get comfortable with the course by checking out water conditions, the swim entry, exit layouts, along with turn buoy locations.
- Identify basic navigation points so that you know what you are swimming towards.

9. Start Easy – Relax and Breathe

- Don't race at maximum effort from the start.
- Relax and focus on proper breathing technique as you settle into a sustainable pace.

10. Be Alert and Ask for Help

- In a race setting always stop at the first sign of a medical problem.
- If you or a fellow athlete needs help, just raise your hand to alert a lifeguard or safety boat.
- Feel free to hold on to a static object like a raft, buoy, or dock.
- As long as you don't use it to move forward, you won't face disqualification.
- Race rules allow for competitors to stop or rest at any time during the swim.