

OPTIMIZE RECOVERY TO ENHANCE PERFORMANCE

In order to make all that dedicated training stick, it's important to nail your recovery. Nail the recovery, and you can be ready for the next big training session. So, the question is, "How much better would your training be if you could accelerate your recovery?" Use these recovery strategies to optimize your training.

"There's no such thing as over training, just under recovery." -Joe Vigil

There are many, many recovery strategies but here are a few that are easy for every athlete to implement immediately:

#1) Modulate Your Training Load

Obedying the stress/rest cycle is a core principle in training. So, if you want to accelerate your recovery, make sure that after a big stressor like a long run, hard bike workout, or race, you lower the stress in upcoming workouts. The easiest way to accomplish this is by modulating the effort of your subsequent workouts.

In simple terms, it means that after a hard/long workout or race you lower the training load by backing off the intensity of the next couple of workouts. It might be tempting to skip them all together, but don't do that. An easy workout will usually help you recover faster than sitting on the couch, and an easy workout always contributes to aerobic fitness.

This all makes sense, but as you peak in your fitness (usually in the last 4-8 weeks before your big race), it can become easy to train too hard recovery days. The fitness is there, but you are tempted to test it on every workout. You feel great and are getting into a "racers" mindset so it's critical that you *purposely* reduce your training load by easing up on your recovery days.

This strategy keeps the body happy (fewer injuries from pushing a tired body too hard) and sets you up for your high-quality workouts in the coming days. This not only builds more race-specific fitness but also boosts your confidence and motivation for your race. That's a win-win.

#2) Ramp Up Rest

The greatest recovery tool you own is your bed. Sleep is an endangered species in modern society but as an athlete, you must focus on getting good rest. A regular bedtime as well as a good pre-sleep routine can really help you get more and better sleep. I encourage you to set a time to go to bed every night and religiously stick with it, especially in the last 8-10 weeks before your big race.

Research shows that a sound bedtime routine includes turning off your devices, shutting out the light, having a comfy linen set, cooling down the room, reducing caffeine in the hours before and quieting your mind as you slowly wind down from the day. Just as you have a warm-up routine before your big workouts, create an evening “pre-sleep” routine that you follow each night. You’ll be amazed at how much better your sleep is.

But it doesn’t end there, any resting you do is helpful. In the documentary [Born to Run](#), Sebastian Coe says that in his serious training period, he wouldn’t even go to the shops as it was time on his feet that would interfere with his recovery. It was all about resting up for the next big training session.

I encourage you to not only think about your sleep but also about simply resting. Take time to nap, lay down or simply sit down and rest. Close your eyes. Relax and rest. Put your phone down and get off social media. If you’re feeling a little bit bored from the resting, then you are doing it right! Force yourself to spend more time relaxing. Your workouts will improve.

#3) Nutrition/Hydration with Occasional Super-Meals

All athletes know that nutrition is fuel. It provides energy, rebuilds the body’s tissues that are damaged from training and builds new mitochondria, capillaries, enzymes, etc. that boost fitness. So, it goes without saying that proper nutrition to enhances recovery.

Never go into your workouts with the tank on empty and commit to having a shake or smoothie (4:1 carbohydrate:protein ratio) in the 30 minutes after each hard or long workout and you’ll ramp up your recovery.

But it doesn’t end there. In addition to good daily nutrition and the recovery shake after hard/long workouts, the occasional “super-meal” can help you recover as well. You can use this strategy every two to four weeks to accelerate recovery.

Whenever you notice you are extra tired, moody and/or feeling more fatigue than expected, it might be time to ramp up the calories for at least one meal. It may be counterintuitive for people who are trying to lose weight, but if you’ve been conscientious about your pre and post workout fueling and have been eating clean and light during the hours outside your training window you might be in too much of a calorie deficit to continue with long or hard workouts. This sets an athlete up for deep fatigue, injury, and ‘training failure’ (inability to sustain normal workout intensity/volume). It also sets an athlete up for an off-the-rails eating binge!

Pay attention to your mood/fatigue and head off any problems by having an extra-large plate of pasta, a huge breakfast, or a couple of extra slices of pizza. A well-timed large meal will ramp up your energy, stoke your metabolic furnace, and will reset the body/mind to immediately improve your training.

If you find that you need to do this more than once a week, you might be over-restricting your calorie intake. Pay attention to this and learn how your body responds best. Do yourself a favor and don't weigh yourself more than a couple of times per week AND make sure that you are not just tracking weight, but that you are tracking hydration, fat/muscle ratio and bone density using a [smart scale](#).

#4) Comedy - News = Mental Recovery

Neuroscience has shown that by manipulating your brain you can help it recover faster. Meditation is a great tool, but another strategy is watching or reading something light and funny. Anything that makes you laugh can have a profound effect on your recovery. Make a list of go-to shows and movies that make you laugh out loud. After hard/long workouts or when you are feeling extra tired, put your feet up and watch one (or two!).

Because the brain responds to what it sees, taking a "news/social media fast" during your recovery period (the 24-48 hours after a hard/long workout) is an excellent strategy as well. The news (TV, print, online) is mostly negative and that negativity is a drain on the mind/body. So, skip it. Trust me. You won't miss anything, and your body/mind will feel more refreshed and excited about the upcoming training.

#5) Ice baths

The jury is still out on whether ice aids or impedes recovery, but there is a reason that athletic training rooms have dedicated spaces for ice baths. Some people swear by them – especially after a long run when there can be micro-tears in the muscle fibers of your legs. Cryo-therapy works on the same principal, and you can try that out at Restore Hyper Wellness.

#6) Mobility

The idea of mobility (aka stretching, flexibility) has evolved over time and we now know that [mobility](#) work to actively stabilize the muscles near the joint, as well as [lyengar-type yoga](#), can play a huge role in recovery. And it's not just about the muscles. The focus on breathing and relaxation with this type of stretching and mobility work also helps calm the nervous system which allows the muscles to relax.

Having your best race requires a high level of motivation and confidence. This comes from nailing the race-specific workouts and managing the training/recovery balance. Pay attention to all the details and you'll have the race of your dreams.

SOURCES:

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