

FOR RECOVERY AFTER TRAINING AND RACING

Recovery is perhaps the most important part of training for without it we would never improve, yet it is typically the most neglected. For many people it means having a shower and heading to the pub or to bed. However, as you'll see from these top tips, there are many more things you can do to maximise your recovery...

1 KEEP MOVING

As tempting as it is to finish your run and collapse into the nearest chair, you'll do your legs a favour if you can stay on your feet and at least walk around a bit. If you can manage a short cool down run even better but after a marathon, a walk will be sufficient. By continuing to move you keep the blood flowing which helps remove waste products in the muscles, reduces the potential for delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) and reduces the chance of dizziness or fainting. Try to stay moving until your heart rate returns to close to normal.

2 REHYDRATE

As your muscles are made up of around 70 percent water it is important to rehydrate after a hard run. A good rule is to continue drinking water until your urine is clear again. Replenishing your electrolytes is also important especially if you sweat a lot. Food contains ample electrolytes but if your stomach can't handle the thought of food for a while then a sports drink containing electrolytes is a good option.

3 REPLACING CARBOHYDRATES

When you finish a long hard run your metabolism will take a while to return to normal so it is really important to continue to take on plenty of calories regularly to avoid your blood sugar dropping too low. You can do this by taking on sports drinks and bars or with real food. If you use real food begin with refined carbohydrates, ie quick release, as they will enter the blood stream quicker. An hour or two after the run you can return to a healthier unrefined diet, with low GI oats, grains, and brown bread, pasta or rice.

4 DON'T FORGET PROTEIN

Protein is often the forgotten food for distance runners yet we need it for strength. Protein also provides the building blocks for the muscles to repair the damage done during hard training or racing. Research has shown that consuming protein with carbohydrates after a run is far more beneficial than consuming carbohydrates alone. The combination will increase carbohydrate absorption, increase protein intake by the muscles, improve muscle rehydration and stimulate your immune system. A ratio of carbohydrate to protein of 4:1 seems to work best, so a tuna sandwich, with a banana and a carb-based drink would work really well.

5 AVOID THE HOT BATH

As tempting as it may be, a hot bath after a hard session can delay your recovery as it can increase the inflammatory response of the body. Many athletes use ice baths and although the scientific evidence is less than overwhelming, anecdotally most athletes report that sitting for 10 to 15 minutes in cold water helps their recovery. If the thought of sitting in a bath of freezing cold water doesn't appeal, you can achieve a similar effect by having a hot and cold shower, simply alternate one minute of cold with two minutes of hot. Alternatively, place an ice pack on sore muscles for 10 minutes.

6 COMPRESSION CLOTHING

Many athletes have taken to wearing compression clothing before, during and after exercise. It is claimed that wearing them after exercise will help speed up recovery as it improves venous return (blood returning to the heart). Whilst the scientific evidence is far from conclusive, once

again anecdotally, many athletes swear by this gear.

7 SLEEP

The role of sleep in recovery cannot be overestimated. It is when our body releases various hormones including human growth hormone to repair all the damage we have done to our muscles. Ensure you get your eight hours worth to give your body the maximum opportunity to repair itself.

8 RECOVERY SESSION

If you can run the day after a race, then a very easy light run can be beneficial. You will find your legs will be stiff and sore initially, this should ease as you warm up. As soon as you feel them stiffening up again stop, you've done enough. The pace should be very, very easy. If you can't face the thought of running the next day then cross train instead, an easy bike-ride or a swim are great ways to speed up your recovery.

9 MASSAGE

A post event massage may help to reduce muscle soreness and speed up recovery. If you haven't got access to a good masseur self-massage or using a foam roller can be very beneficial.

10 STRETCHING

Contrary to popular opinion stretching has no effect on muscular soreness and is not recommended if your legs are very stiff and sore such as following a marathon. Stretching can further stress the already damaged muscles. **RF**

ANDY DUBOIS

Andy is an elite ultramarathon runner and a qualified Personal Trainer and Exercise Coach www.andydubois.blogspot.com, andydubois@hotmail.co.uk.