

The Training and Recovery Balancing Act



© Getty Images/Ironman

TEXT BY DR. SIMON SOSTARIC |
PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES AND SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

At some point in time, something caught your eye. Provoked a sense of inquisition. It enticed you. Made you think. You read inspirational excerpts on the greats, at the pointy end of the sport, and the not so greats - but with an equally enthralling story to tell. Consciously or subconsciously, these stories made you think and drew you in. You read more. You spoke to people. You watched carefully and listened intently. Finally, you took the plunge, invested in the necessary equipment, and started training for a triathlon. Before you know it, you have lined up for a smash fest like no other. You're a glutton for punishment, so you keep coming back for more.

For the majority, we reconcile early in the piece that training and competing in the sport of triathlon is not necessarily about winning world titles. Indeed, triathlon is a sport in which you will learn a lot about yourself. Just like the fundamentals of life itself, competing in the sport of triathlon is not so much about the end results - rather, it's about the journey.

That said the ultimate competition comes from within. Learning about where your physical and psychological ceiling is - how deep can you go? Extracting the best out of yourself.

As a triathlete, the nature of the beast is such that you have plenty of time to think. Swimming, riding and running for

hours on end down the road less travelled. Liberating? Yes. Motivating? For sure. Clouded judgement? From time to time most certainly, you are human after all.

Every now and then you hit the crossroads and need to make a decision. Which way do I go?

Who do I seek advice from? Your friends say you are crazy. Your family only want the best for you. Your coach is dangling the carrot and encouraging you to persevere through thick and thin.

By now, you fully appreciate that this is a thinking person's sport. Ultimately, it's up to you to make the decisions.

PLANNING FOR PROGRESS & SUCCESS

Many athletes are highly motivated to train long and hard. That's the easy part. But how smart do they train, recover and compete?

As a professional working in the field of sports performance for 20+ years, I have seen my fair share of triathletes take a turn for the worse. Invariably, most endurance athletes that I see in the first instance have come looking for solutions to a myriad of largely self-induced problems that adversely affect health and performance.

The keys to consistency, sustainability and viability are organisation and clarity in your approach.

Do you have the work/train/compete/family/life balance right? The modern era of life is dynamic and unpredictable. Therefore adaptability to changing and challenging life circumstances is a prerequisite to not only maintaining the status quo but also reaching new found levels of physical and mental prowess.

Besides the obvious, an athlete's organisational skill reflects forward thinking on managing training workloads and finding the right time to validate and utilise specific performance enhancing methods and tools that are unique to your individual needs. Organisation should also encompass embracing proactive monitoring methods that are in line with best practice when you are healthy and have everything under control - rather than adopting the all too common reactive approach to seeking assistance from a health professional when the proverbial bowl contents hit the fan.

Clarity reflects the rationale behind your training and ancillary methods - your ability to see the forest for the trees.

A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

Having set your targets for 2017, there will be many questions that remain unanswered. Are you doing too much or too little training? Are you under or overdoing recovery? Are you adequately prepared for competing in the heat? Have you found the tapering methods that give you the right sensations during your race?

How do you juggle the time commitments across the primary training modes in order to build your strength and resilience to fatigue and injury? And on it goes.

The principles of regular training are clear to most. Fundamentally, the principles of training are to develop resilience in the face of significant physical/mental challenges and to improve fitness. Indeed, the health benefits of regular training are also numerous and profound. However, when the training-recovery balance tips the wrong way for extended periods, athletes are exposed to a high incidence of systemic illness and soft tissue injuries.

LOGICAL APPROACH TO ENHANCING RECOVERY

The world of sports performance is currently inundated with an overwhelming array of gadgets, treatments, pills and potions claiming to be an 'essential ingredient' to accelerating recovery and subsequently improving performance. For those looking for an edge, be wary of the magic bullet claims that seem too good to be true. There are many charlatan sales people out there that are happy to take your hard earned dollar, regardless of safety and efficacy. Triathlon training is dynamic - literally and figuratively. Therefore recovery practices, particularly those addressing muscle/immune system loads and energy requirements, should vary according to what periodisation stage you are undertaking.

“Do you have the work/train/compete/family/life balance right?”
— Dr. Simon Sostaric



© Shutterstock.com

8

Tips to kick-starting a simple yet effective and sustainable training-recovery balance



1. Monitor your training loads. There are numerous cloud-based training applications, such as Training Peaks (trainingpeaks.com) that are easy to access and operate and provide a valuable resource for your management of training loads and subsequent responses. A sports/health practitioner assisting you with injury or illness will always request precise information about your training background.



2. Wherever possible, focus on consuming whole, nutritious foods rather than supplements to meet your training and recovery needs. If you are unsure, seek assistance from a qualified accredited sports dietitian.



3. Ensure increments in training loads (volume and intensity) are gradual and sustainable



4. Respond to niggles quickly. Not necessarily a sign that you have to stop training, rather, modify your training loads and increase strength across the affected area. *Refer to a physiotherapist.*



5. Replenish with ~40-60g carbohydrate/~10g protein within 30-60min following glycogen-depleting training sessions (e.g. high-intensity interval training) to help with muscle responsiveness during your next training session.



6. Try to stabilise sleep patterns with consistent sleep/wake times. Sleep time (7-8hrs for most athletes) is the catalyst for regulating muscle repair, and hormonal, immune system and metabolic function.



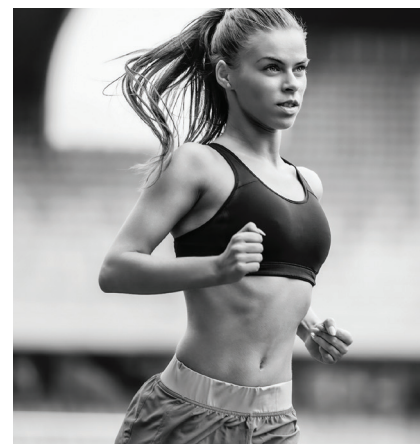
7. Periodic whole body ice baths after hard training in summer to reduce body temperature and systemic inflammation. 11-14 C water temperature for 5min, building to 10min.



8. Athletes who want to reduce body fat are often vulnerable to fatigue and illness. Ensure you consult with a qualified sports dietitian or exercise physiologist to monitor changes in your body composition.

TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING?

Paradoxically, extenuating recovery modalities *ad nauseum* is counterproductive for progressive adaptation and performance. Carefully planned periods of 'training low' (i.e. in a partially glycogen depleted state) or periods of training when incompletely recovered will facilitate important physiological adaptations, not to mention resilience. The building phase of your training is the ideal setting for a minimalist approach to recovery interventions.



© Shutterstock.com

I'm looking forward to sharing with you a series of thought-provoking, logical and practical high performance and scientific perspectives throughout 2017. In the meantime, gather your thoughts, think carefully and clearly about your training and competition expectations, and map out an organisation chart that highlights your strengths, weaknesses and contingency pathways.

In the next edition of Australian Triathlete Magazine we will focus our attention to understanding fatigue and over-training. **AT**

DR SIMON SOSTARIC
PhD, BAppSc, AEP, AES
Exercise Physiologist / Sport Scientist

Dr Simon Sostaric is a distinguished exercise physiologist, sports scientist, researcher and author. Simon holds a physiology doctorate (Victoria University, Melbourne, Australia), in electrolyte regulation and skeletal muscle fatigue. He is the founder and director of Melbourne Sports & Allied Health Clinic (www.msahc.com.au), with 25 years' experience in professional sport, clinical practice and academia.

For more information,
Twitter: @DrSimonSostaric
Facebook: @melbournesports
andalliedhealthclinic

Australian Triathlete has a new digital home!

NEW WEBSITE



For all the up-to-date tri news + best bits from the magazine you love, head to:

www.austrimag.com.au

Triathlete
magazine