



Rest & Recovery

The power of recovery is a commonly underestimated aspect of training. Most people are aware that rest and recovery are integral parts of wellness, but it is also an area that is frequently neglected or regarded as unnecessary. Rest and recovery are central pieces to any training program. Missing this opportunity to repair muscle damage can leave you with more than just aching legs.

Recovery has been defined as the actions taken to maximize the body's ability to repair. Multiple systems of the body require recovery as activity impacts hormonal, neurological and structural systems. Consequently, all of these systems need to be addressed for proper recovery. Many runners and other athletes have a tendency to train diligently without building in time for recovery. As form and fatigue worsen, performance declines. The athlete may believe they need to train harder, worsening the situation and leading to overtraining. Even more concerning, failing to recover can cause or complicate an injury.

Researchers have been working for decades attempting to improve the process of recovery and reduce the muscle soreness, injury and fatigue that can result from training. It is also important to know that muscles recover quickest due to direct blood flow. Tendons, ligaments and bones receive indirect blood flow and can take longer to recover and are more susceptible to injury and overtraining stress. The following is a rundown of common elements of rest and recovery that anyone can integrate into their fitness routine.

SLEEP: Experts agree that sleep is the KEY to effective training and recovery. Getting adequate sleep helps to support mental health, hormonal balance and muscle recovery. Each individual has different sleep needs based on their lifestyle, workouts and genetics, but between 7-10 hours per night is needed for most active people.

**Interesting fact: Hours slept before 12 midnight are proven to be more effective than those slept after midnight! So if you're a night owl like me, science says that we should really make an effort to get to bed earlier.

Tips to maximize sleep:

- ~Minimize artificial light in your bedroom.
- ~Wake up with the sun if possible.
- ~Try to get some fresh air during the daytime.
- ~Keep your bedroom at a cooler temperature.

NUTRITION: Everything we eat has the ability to heal our body or to add toxins that stress our body. Eating real and minimally processed foods and balanced meals is proven to be effective for maintaining health and performance. Food in our society goes way beyond providing fuel for our bodies. Most social events include food; the key is finding balance so you get what your body needs AND you enjoy life.

There are so many good ways for athletes to meet nutritional needs. No one way of eating works for every individual, so I never tell people that they should eat a specific diet. There also seems to be a new performance enhancing supplement trend every week. Experts do agree on a few things nutritionally:

1. Getting enough protein is very important for active people who are trying to maintain muscle strength.
2. Anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory foods (think fruits and vegetables) are beneficial for decreasing muscle damage.
3. Omega-3 fatty acids (fish!) assist in decreasing fatigue.
4. Lab work can help detect nutritional deficiencies that may be fixed with food.

When in doubt, consult with a dietary professional, preferably one who has experience with athletes.

HYDRATION: Drinking adequate amounts of fluid is critical to overall health, energy, recovery and performance. Water is absolutely critical to all of the functions occurring in our bodies. The easiest way to assess hydration is to look at your urine. If it is pale yellow, you're probably hydrated; if it is dark yellow, you probably need to increase your fluid intake.

Tips to maximize hydration:

- ~WATER is the best way to hydrate. You can add lemon, lime, orange or cucumber slices to add some fun flavor. (and YES....sparkling water counts!!)
- ~Adding electrolytes before, during and after activity helps to replenish what is lost through sweating. I am a huge fan of NUUN products, but there are lots of other great options out there. Just check labels to make sure you're only ingesting ingredients that you want!
- ~Many products that are marketed as sports drinks are high in sugar and other additives that can stress your system by giving it more to process. Do some research and READ LABELS to make sure you are actually putting things in your body that are beneficial.

SELF-MYOFASCIAL RELEASE: This is a fancy term for a specific type of massage to release tight muscles and trigger points. It can be done with a foam roller, lacrosse ball, dense foam ball or a variety of other products on the market. By applying pressure to certain areas of the body, you are able to assist tight muscles in returning to normal function. Normal function means your muscles are elastic, healthy and ready to perform.

Trigger points are "knots" that form in muscles. They can often be identified by referred pain. Pain referral can be described as pain that is felt or radiated in one area of the body when pressure is applied in another area. Releasing trigger points helps to reestablish proper movement patterns and pain free movement.

Imagine a bungee cord with a knot in it. Stretching alone will create tension and stretch the unknotted muscle, the knot, however, will remain. Foam rolling can help with releasing these knots with pressure, helping to restore normal blood flow and function to the muscles.

Some of you may have attended one of the many FOAM ROLLING workshops that I have taught at Gaukler Family Wellness Center. The goal of this workshop is to take the participants through a full body foam rolling session so that they feel comfortable using the foam roller on their own. We will be having at least one more workshop this spring. Watch the schedule for time and date!

STRETCHING: Studies suggest that simply holding a position for 15 seconds after a tough workout has little or no effect on short term muscle recovery. That's not to say that you shouldn't make stretching a regular part of your routine. A better long term option is to incorporate flexibility training (prolonged stretching over time) which has been shown to reduce the amount of muscle damage that occurs during intense



training. Yoga can be a very effective way to incorporate flexibility training into your routine. Brenda Ingstad offers both Recovery and Restorative yoga classes at Gaukler Family Wellness; class times are posted online. If those times don't work for your schedule, there are lots of reputable instructors on several fitness apps, YouTube and other online options.

****Stretching side note:** You SHOULD include dynamic stretching in your warmups! There are many dynamic warmup routines out there. Many include lunges, leg swings, high knees and other dynamic movements that help to prepare your body to run. Studies show that dynamic stretching warmups may decrease injuries to runners.

ICE/HEAT/COMPRESSION: All of these strategies can help reduce inflammation and increase circulation. The research seems to continuously change on the what-where-how to use these approaches. Currently, the literature states that alternating heat and cold seems to produce the best recovery results; when to use compression varies from during activity to following activity. I personally LOVE the way full compression socks make my legs feel after a difficult workout. It's like a mini-massage for my legs!

As you're reading this, I hope you are thinking about how you are going to incorporate rest and recovery into your fitness routine. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me. I'm hoping for a super full foam rolling workshop in April!!

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Happy Running!

Stacy Ingstad, BSN
RRCA Level I Certified Running Coach
stacyingstad@mac.com