

The Four R's of the Off-Season – Rest, Recover, Repair & Recharge

With leaves and temperatures falling, winter is upon us and so is the “off-season.” Generally, this term refers to the period that runs from the completion of your last race, until the period of specific build for your first race of the upcoming season. Far too often, athletes do not take enough down-time during this very important phase of training and set themselves up for burn-out, injury or an unsatisfying season. The beginning of the off-season, which starts with the transition phase, is the time to allow your body to rest, recover, repair and recharge.

For some athletes the transition phase means a complete cessation of training until spring rolls around. For others it is a quick two-week break of reduced training and then back to the salt mines, grinding out endless miles on the road and yards in the pool. The transition phase is not the time to turn into a couch potato (Studies have shown that VO₂max can decrease 4 to 14 percent in as little as 4 weeks of inactivity and endurance performance can decrease as much as 25 percent during a 2 to 4 week period of inactivity.) or is it time to jump back too quickly to your structured training program (Continuous high volume, high intensity training has been shown to lead to both physical and mental burn-out.). During this time, you will need to find a balance of rest and reduced volume and intensity.

To begin your off-season on the right foot, you will need to think “decrease,” not “cease” during the transition phase, which should last anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks. Take a few days completely off from training to begin—longer if your last event of the season was an iron distance race. Then go out and just exercise for the pure enjoyment of it—no plan, no agenda, just keep the blood moving.

These easy, short, low heart rate bouts of exercise are the beginning of your preparation for next season and they should leave you rested and excited as you embark on the structured base phase of your training. You may feel that you are a bit behind your training partners, who are hammering while you are cruising, this late fall and early winter; but, come mid and late season next year you will be fresher and having more fun while they will be burning out and dreading their next workout.

Follow these suggestions for your transition phase and take the first step to your best season yet:

- Lose your training log and relax.
- Ditch your heart rate monitor and go by feel.
- Throw in a day or two of complete rest each week.
- Stay off the roads and hit the trails on a mountain bike.
- Try deep-water running or an aqua-fitness class.

- Participate in a Yoga or Pilates class.
- Take long walks with family, friends or a pet.
- Head to the lake for a paddle in a kayak or canoe.
- Take a break from your master's swim group.
- Swim on your own and do not count the yardage.
- Skip the weight room and complete body weight exercises.
- Sleep in.
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