



# Integrating Training Into Life

## *A philosophy of health, balance and performance*

Time. Something we always need more of, especially if we are juggling commitments with work, relationships and social activities, while trying to squeeze in exercise and training. If you are training for an event, or planning to this year, you likely wish you had an extra two or three hours each day to get in the training you need. Unfortunately you will never get those extra hours, hence the importance of adopting a strategy and philosophy that will help you maintain health and provide you with great results with your limited time.

Whatever your goal is, ranging from winning the Hawaii Ironman, competing in your first event or even just improving body composition, your performance and adaptations will be governed by the status of your metabolic health. In this case being *healthy* does not mean an absence of disease, but rather functioning with a strong immune system and hormonal profile that will allow you to make positive adaptations to your hard training.

Metabolic health is limited primarily by *stress*, yes, that magic word! Considering stress as a physical or emotional strain on the body, you should be able to identify many of the *stressors* in your daily life that may negatively affect your metabolic health. If you think about it for a minute or two you may come up with factors relating to stress from work, relationships, time management, financial and even a little self-stress (such as body image or your place in the world). These are stressors that are part of life and will always need to be managed in order to stay healthy.

What you may not have considered in your list was exercise and training, nutrition or recovery (and sleep). While exercise may well be a stress-relief for you, it remains a physiological stress and needs to be considered along side your other stressors. Proper sleep and nutrition will be great promoters of metabolic health, or



*stress-reducers*, but poorly timed or quality eating habits, or inadequate recovery or sleep, will have serious consequences for metabolic health.

Stress has a nasty habit of accumulating – suppressing our metabolic health. It does not discriminate between sources of stress, in fact it can hardly tell the difference physiologically. This accumulation from different sources is resisted for long periods by your body, often without strong warning signs, but ultimately negative consequences inevitably occur. This can come in the form of fatigue, injury or performance decline.

Your training goal should be **balance and consistency**. If you can achieve this, your chances of improvement and success are great. Unfortunately many athletes just pile more and more training *on top* of a

busy life, believing more training is the key to that next level. The natural casualty is sleep and recovery, with nutrition also taking a back seat as your limited time causes poor food choices due to eating on the run.

Interestingly if you have immense drive, commitment and enthusiasm to succeed, so often viewed as an attribute to a winning mentality, it could also act as your weakness. As is so often the case, the strength can also act to be the weakness. The tendency to over do it is often enhanced by the prevailing culture of ‘no pain, no gain’ within endurance sports, and if all your peers are pushing the boundaries of physical limitation, shouldn’t you too?

It is incredibly difficult to rise above the naive approach of others, in fact, I often have to have repeated conversations with some of my top athletes, reminding them of our training mantra – *anyone can train hard, the best know how to recover!*

### Your Pillars of Performance

When you are thinking about your training program it is really easy to consider the training that needs to get done. Of course, this is critical, but of equal importance is your recovery from that training and the nutritional support you provide through proper fueling and eating habits. Training, recovery and nutrition, your three pillars of performance, will help you achieve balance and consistency. From here it is easy to elevate overall performance and be successful. By considering the three components equally, a shift in mindset for many, you *will* achieve better results.

If you embrace the concept of recovery you are on the right path, but the question still remains of how to build it *into* the plan. This is often different for each individual, but there are a couple of guiding principles that apply to nearly every athlete regardless of level and ability. Many of my athletes embrace their *blue days* named for

no specific reason I must admit but everyone knows the meaning.

In *purplepatch* terminology, a blue day is a day that should provide very low physiological training stress on the body. It can either be a rest day or the activity for the day should be designed to rejuvenate the system and move blood around the body. We seldom go more than three days in a row before adding in a blue day to recover, which helps us find consistency.

If you are similar to most working athletes you may do much of your longer training on the weekends, so to enable adequate training cycles many will have Mondays and Fridays as blue days, leaving the weekend and Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday as *white* training days.

Call the blue days what you like, but differentiating the goal of the days will help you stay on track with the goal of the session. We also build in regular recovery *blocks* into training, and these occur every 10 to 14 days. Traditional blocks of training last three weeks or more, but research and experience tells me this is too much for most. If you have quality training for up to two weeks, three to five days of recovery (multiple blue days) will optimize training effectiveness, limit injury risk, and maintain motivation and enjoyment. This is a winning combination.

If you shift your mindset to a big picture view of your life and training, and heighten the emphasis on recovery, you will remain enthused and consistent. Remember, a plan is a critical first step that can help in your success, but a little honesty and self-assessment can help you make smart decisions in your exercise and training routines.

If life is getting in the way, whether it is an unexpected family emergency or a massive travel schedule with work, ask yourself if giving up much needed sleep to train on an already tired body is really the logical path. If in doubt you may decide to make it a blue day, stay healthy, and come back another day ready to hit the training hard. Your logical decisions will always be rewarded with health and performance. <<

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## Rest Time?

Making logical training decisions is naturally tough for a motivated athlete. When should you push through and when should you back off? If you are experiencing any of these symptoms then you are likely over-tired and rest is your prescription.

- Low energy during the day, but struggle to sleep well at night.
- Consistent night sweats when asleep.
- Mood swings, irritability or a loss of motivation to train.
- Unusually sore muscles to the touch.
- Resting or exercising heart rate is consistently suppressed, despite perceived effort being high.
- Frequent cases of mild sickness (colds) or inability to recover from a sickness.
- Unexplained fevers without other symptoms.
- Multiple workouts in a row with poor performance.
- Rapid changes in body composition (either retention of fat or loss of body weight).
- Changes in appetite or eating habits

## Results Oriented

Get more from your training sessions - here are a few tips that can help you optimize your training and get the results you want.

*Specificity* - Make sure you know the focus on the session and follow it. If it is easy, then it is a failure to go hard!

*Variance* - The body responds well to intensity variations within and across training. Even long workouts should have small fluctuations in intensity to stimulate adaptations.

*Form* - Training is not just how hard you can go. In every sport a large focus in every session should be on form, biomechanics and drills.

*Recovery* - Make it central and recover as 'hard' as you train.

*Fuel* - Supporting training with proper fueling is critical. Every session utilizes carbohydrates as fuel and you must support your training with consistent intake of fuel (calories). While you are training is not a time to limit calories.



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