

GUIDELINES FOR YOUR TRAINING BREAK

©PEAK RUNNING PERFORMANCE, November-December 2003
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If you just finished running a marathon, or completing an extended road racing, cross country, or track season, you are probably ready for a 3-4 week training break before piling on the miles in preparation for your next target race or racing season. Here are some ideas to help guide your training break.

1. A training break doesn't necessarily have to mean a break from running. Most likely, what you need most is a mental break from several months of highly-structured training and/or intense racing. Consider this to be an opportunity to break-away from your daily training routine for a while and run **When** you feel like running, **Where** you feel like running, and **How** you feel like running.

2. If your body is telling you that you need a complete break from running...take it! Decompress, relax, and work on your tan or your jump-shot. Don't feel guilty about taking a break after an extended period of training and racing. Rejuvenating your body and re-energizing your spirits between seasons or periods of dedicated race preparation is all part of the training cycle. Trust your body and psyche to tell you when you're ready to run again.

3. When you do run, **run easy, run long.** Run some different loops and enjoy some different scenery. Forget about your pace and focus on your enjoying your environment and just being outdoors.

4. If your training break is during the summer, **run early, run late.** Avoid the heat and peak air-pollution periods and maximize your comfort and recovery by running early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

5. Jog with your friends. If you are a serious runner, you probably train with other serious runners. Your training break is an opportunity to jog with friends who normally would not, or could not, train with you. Take this time to enjoy running with your friends as a social activity.

6. Sleep, sleep, sleep...Eat, eat, eat...Drink, drink, drink (WATER, that is!) Nothing will accelerate your restoration, recovery, and rejuvenation more than giving your body the sleep and good nutrition it needs.

7. Do some cross-training. Swimming, biking, hiking, and roller-blading are all great aerobic, big muscle cross-training activities. If you've never done any pool-training (running in the water), your training break is a great time to start. Less vigorous recreational exercise or sports activities (frizbee, golf, softball, etc.) are also good cross-training during this period.

8. Get a check-up and a tune-up. Your training break is the time to get some sports massage and have any nagging injuries or persistent foot/leg problems checked-out. Make an appointment to see a recommended sports doctor or chiropractor, or go to a sports medicine center, to get an assessment of your persistent aches and pains and review your treatment options. An important part any prescribed therapy should be strengthening exercises to incorporate into your training regime and strategies to eliminate your injuries and reduce your training-induced discomforts in the future.

PLANNING FOR YOUR NEXT TARGET RACE OR RACING SEASON

After a few weeks when your batteries are beginning to recharge, you should take some time to recap your season or assess the race that was the target of your last extended period of training and use that evaluation to remodel your training for the upcoming season or your next target race. What you learn from that appraisal, and the changes you make to your training and racing as a result, can be the most valuable outcomes of your training break.

For instance, if you were just beginning to hit your stride when the season ended, you may want to consider racing earlier, or more frequently, next season. If, however, your performances declined at the end of the season, you need to determine whether over-training or too many races was to blame for your burn-out.

Most of the elite-level, post collegiate distance runners I've coached over the past 20-years want to train moderately hard EVERY DAY....and often twice a day. In my opinion, this is the very definition of over-training. But, alas, it is the easiest way to maintain a regime of high training mileage....and some runners treasure the numbers logged in their training diaries as if they are best-selling novels. The problem with training moderately hard every day is embodied within the "SAID" Principle (Systematic Adaptation to Increased Demands). This principle describes both the "process" of training (the gradual increase of training load) and how that process results in improved running performance (adaptation.) That adaptation occurs only during recovery when the body responds to the micro-trauma introduced to the neuromuscular and respiratory systems in training by repairing and rebuilding those systems to make them stronger. If recovery is incomplete or insufficient, adaptation is incomplete and improvement is compromised. The other problem with training moderately hard every day is that it makes it virtually impossible to insert spikes of harder, more intense training into one's program. That is because said runner will find himself incapable of following it with yet another moderately hard training day. The bottom line is, the **Number** of miles you run in training isn't nearly important as **How** those miles are run and what pieces they contribute to the puzzle of preparing you to run faster when you step to the starting line to race.

It must also be said that every distance runner has a finite number of race-type efforts that he or she can summon over the course of a racing season. That number varies according to the individual, how they have prepared in training, and how those races are spaced within a racing calendar. While increasing the quality of your "hard" training days is essential to improving the overall quality of your training, that concept can be sabotaged by the fact that highly-motivated distance runners are often tempted to push themselves to their uppermost limits during a hard training session. While that might seem like a good thing, the reality is, that training session ends up counting against the finite number of **race efforts** those athletes are capable of producing over the course of the season. There is a reason why we call training "practice." It is a sad fact that some very gifted athletes never seem to learn how to train to produce their best performances in their most important competitions, rather than in training. The coaches of such athletes often find their biggest challenge is holding them a step back from the brink in training. You should always finish even your most intense training sessions feeling as if you could have run a little faster, run a little further, or done a few more repetitions had it been necessary. That will assure the easy days built into your training will fulfill their intended purpose of providing the recovery you need to maximize your improvement.

That said, there may be nothing you need to do to optimize your training other than, 1) take the easier training days you need to provide sufficient recovery from your hard training days (even if it keeps you from achieving some artificial weekly training mileage goal), and 2) avoid turning a hard training day into a race day.

Should your evaluation focus on the **target race** you had been training for, rather than a season of competition, there are other things to consider. If you were running to achieve a specific time and think you started too fast because you were unable to maintain that pace over the 2nd half of the race, perhaps you need to do more tempo runs and/or training at goal pace. If you ran relatively even pace, but finished well off your goal, either your goal, or the amount and quality of training you dedicated to achieving it, was unrealistic. If your performance exceeded your expectations, it sends a message that you are ready to increase your current level training...judiciously. If you had one of those awful days where you never felt comfortable, strong, and in-control, a lack of preparatory races could be responsible. For some reason, many distance runners seem to believe they can train, and train, and train, and train...then step to the starting line and produce a peak performance. I know of no other individual sport whose participants share that belief, for it ignores the seminal training principle of "specificity". This principle states that to be effective, training must be "specific" to the demands of the activity. Simply put, it is why sprinters don't train like marathon runners, and marathon runners don't training like sprinters. The specificity of training is important and the most specific training you can do is **run your race**. Some preparatory races are essential for specialists at any distance to achieve a peak performance.

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