




TRAIN SMARTER

Balancing The Cost of Endurance Workouts

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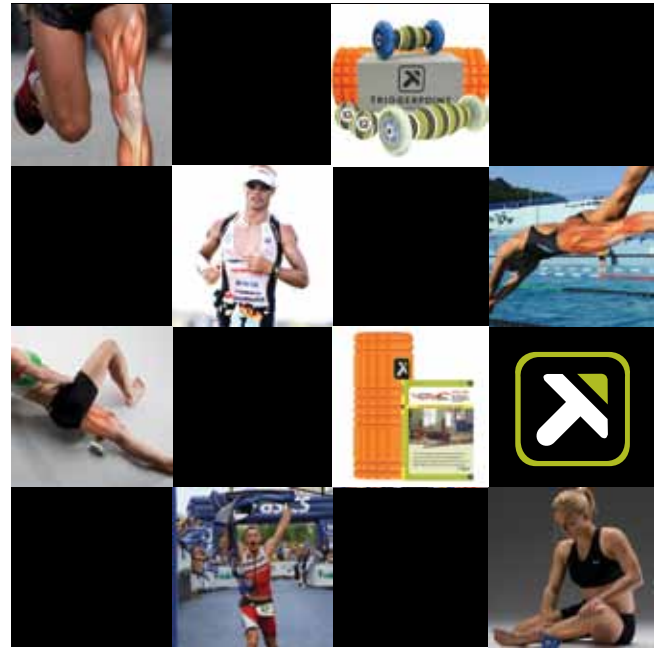
Endurance is the cornerstone of success in triathlon but overtraining can take its toll on your body, ultimately undermining your health and performance. **Kristian Manietta** shares tips on training smarter, not harder.

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High volume, high intensity training is often seen as the best way to prepare for a triathlon, but it can come at a huge cost to your body and lifestyle and negatively impact performance in the long run.

There are a number of ways you can modify your training in order to achieve a better result but training should be about more than just the result. It's about your long-term health, time spent with family and friends and enjoying the lifestyle that being a triathlete can afford you.

As age groupers we need to fit training in around family, work and other social commitments. It's possible to juggle all of this and still perform at an exceptional level, but inappropriate training volumes can lead to suppressed immune systems, illness and injury and it's simply not worth it, no matter what the clock says.

There's no doubt volume has a place in our sport, especially for those competing over Iron distances, but how much we need is something I question every day as a coach. In the end it comes down to the athlete and their personal circumstances. I firmly believe less is more.

This article looks at what happens to your body during aerobic endurance training and offers advice on how you can mitigate some of the negative effects.

THE AEROBIC RESPONSE

Training your endurance systems comes at a cost to your body. This is because pure endurance training causes heightened fatigue and a distinct hormonal shift.

The "endurance effect" kicks in after roughly five hours on the bike and two hours on the run, as well as when athletes combine the two such as in a weekend brick session, resulting in a catabolic shift in your hormonal system. This is essentially your body breaking down in order to adapt to the demands you are placing on it. Continually subjecting your body to such efforts over a prolonged period will eventually result in illness, injuries and lacklustre performance.



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Photo: Andy Cumming



Photo: Dely Carr

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Muscle cramps are often a result of overtraining; Make sure you have sufficient fuel to get you through longer workouts; Don't be afraid to occasionally reduce your pace on longer aerobic sessions



Photo: Delly Carr

CONSISTENCY IS KEY: Your training is only as good as your ability to back it up the next day, being realistic about volume and intensity will serve you better in the long run

IS IT NECESSARY?

Endurance training is necessary if you're competing in Iron distance events, and when done correctly will enhance your aerobic capacity. But it doesn't need to be done as often as you might think and is better placed late in the build rather than early on. Athletes and coaches need to understand that endurance training imposes a high level of fatigue on the body, especially for mesomorph and endomorph body types which break down quicker due to load and muscle make up.

Common sense is vital. If you're always too tired to get any real work done (i.e. to use your other systems effectively), it's likely to be because you're training at an inappropriate volume or intensity.



HOW TIRED IS TOO TIRED?

The training you do is only as effective as your ability to back it up the next day. Stop and think about that. Your ability to back up your training will depend on a number of factors (for more information refer to "Performance Enhancement: Five Steps To Better Racing and Training", *Australian Triathlete* Volume 18.6) but the hours and intensity you put into your training will be a significant factor.

You can and should mitigate the endurance response by better placement of training sessions at every opportunity. In Iron distance training for example, you can reduce the negative effects (such as aerobic response or poor motor patterns bought about by compounding muscular fatigue) simply by adding strength or speed work either immediately or soon after the endurance session.

Examples:

- Instead of just hopping off the bike and running without purpose, insert a series of very short, very fast efforts (20-30 x 30 seconds fast and 30 seconds easy). This will stimulate the speed system, prevent sluggishness from too much long, slow distance training and give you that much needed anabolic response to help promote recovery.

- If you're not running off the bike, another possibility is a swim later in the day with some short "all out" efforts at the beginning of each effort. This also produces a light anabolic response and thus promotes recovery and will maximise the quality of your training as this system has been resting all day.

A New Set of Principles

- Rethink your emphasis on the endurance system when training. Being consistent over time and developing the other systems will enhance your aerobic endurance anyway.

- When hitting those volume thresholds on the bike and run, remember that this causes a hormonal shift that will impact your health and performance.

- When doing long aerobic sessions don't be scared to occasionally go easy (or spend a good portion of the time at an easy pace). This will allow you to soak up the week's training without creating more fatigue. Add some strength work to the back end of the session to get a better quality workout.

- Combine endurance work with short speed work in one of the other disciplines towards the end of the session or later in the day. This will stimulate the dormant speed system that has been switched off while you focussed on endurance work.

There is no question endurance is necessary to perform in triathlon, but it will happen as a by product of smart consistent training over many months and years. By rethinking the way you train and how your sessions are paced, you will get a much greater return from the training you do. Train smart, train hard, but ultimately train with purpose. 🏆

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