**The Challenge between Recovery & Load**

Recovery - we all know that rest is important for the body to recover, but from my experience a lot of athletes miss the big picture. We will happily throw money at hyped-up recovery supplements, monitor our heart rate variability, pay for weekly massages, massage guns and recovery pants, yet then consume takeaway and a bottle of wine for dinner and stay up late watching Netflix. While all of these listed ‘recovery’ methods can help, it is about understanding what load and recovery are trying to achieve, and nailing the major factors that influence recovery first.

Firstly, you need to overload the body through increasing training load to stimulate the body to improve your muscular strength and endurance. However, continuing to load the body without adequate rest will only result in over-training and a possible injury, as well as a drop in training quality. For this reason, balancing overload and recovery is a fine art. You don’t make progress when you train but when you are recovering; when the body is repairing, rebuilding and strengthening itself after being broken down during the training session/s. Recovery replenishes energy stores and repairs damaged tissue. Without this time, the body will continue to breakdown and impact your following training sessions, as well as lead to injury. Simply time, without a greater level of training stress, will provide the body a chance to recover, but this process can be aided by a great level of sleep, low level activity and appropriate nutrition. The period of time we need between sessions is highly individual and depends on your current training fitness and load, including the level of intensity of the training sessions, and the frequency of those higher-intensity training sessions.

Indications of fatigue worth monitoring to identify when a greater amount of recovery is required, include:

* Muscle soreness – Mild muscle soreness is to be expected after a harder training session and generally speaking you are not ready to return to a hard training session until your muscle soreness has settled, which may take 3 days. It is this reason why generally completing higher intensity or long sessions on back-to-back days is not recommended.
* When 24 hrs between sessions is not enough – After a heavy training day (e.g. a race simulation or increase in weight at the gym), then a rest or light training day is required to recover appropriately prior to returning to your next quality session.
* Poor quality back-to-back training sessions – If poor training sessions consistently occur, then the body clearly hasn’t recovered appropriately and recovery is needed for at least a few days. Feel confident to cut the quality sessions and even take at least a few days off all together, and watch the body rebuild to become faster and fitter!
* Elevated heart rate – If your resting heart rate is elevated, then it is critical you back the training off, as you are clearly fatigued.
* General fatigue and loss of appetite – feeling constantly tired, drained, a loss of appetite, or lacking energy and motivation are all signs of increased fatigue and the need to rest up.
* Poor sleep – Difficulties falling asleep or waking frequently throughout the night is a sign that the body is over-trained, which alters the nervous system responsible for relaxing the body and therefore disrupts the natural sleep rhythm.

If any of the above are identified, then rest and recovery is required. Below are a few methods to speed up the process:

* Sleep – make sure you’re getting adequate sleep as this is the number one way to recover! A lack of sleep means an inability for the body to appropriately restore itself, and therefore the body will not be adapting to your training load.
* Rest day – avoiding further loading for physical and psychological recovery.
* Active-Recovery – low intensity, reduced weight bearing exercise of a shorter duration to what you normally undertake (e.g. walking, cycling, swimming, yoga or hydrotherapy). Active-recovery is arguably more beneficial than rest.
* Nutrition – ensure you consume appropriate macronutrients, (carbs, protein and fats), greens and other anti-inflammatory foods, as well as minimising inflammatory substances such as alcohol, sugar and processed meats.
* Massage & foam rolling – it is believed that massage helps with increasing the rate of blood and lymph flow.

Getting the balance of load and recovery can be a real challenge and something you will likely play with over time. Following the guidance above, you can learn to understand and tune in to your own body to better plan your training schedules, allow for recovery as needed and ultimately better your performance.