Home
 * Home

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4:18:4 Copenhagen 4:18:4 Elsinore Company Triathlon • 4:18:4 Erkner 4:18:4 Jönköping • Discontinued Races IRONMAN IRONMAN 70.3 Triathlon Series IRONKIDS Live • Races on Tap • Pro Race Results • Archived Coverage • Athlete Tracker App • Finish Line Cams • Training Programs • Become One Class Of • All World Athlete Age Group Rankings Historical Rankings • TriClubs Benefits Global Rankings TriClub Championships Register a Club Find a Club Clubs Incomplete Data • IRONMAN Legacy Women for Tri Resources • Smart Program Athlete Smart Return Pledge Return Tips Safe Return Guidelines Swim Smart Cycle Smart Racing in the Heat • IRONMAN Life • Rules + Policies Competition Rules Policies Transfers/Withdrawals • Anti-Doping Substances TestingSanctions & Statistics FAQ Contact • Pro Athletes • Volunteer Virtual Club • Connect • About IRONMAN Group History Hall of Fame • Contact Us • Series Partners United States Europe Oceania Asia Canada South Africa • Press Info Media Requests Credential Requests Brand Guidelines Resources • Careers • Podcasts Beyond Shop • Assets • Document Collector Documents • Archived Assets Old Home • Race Assets • EMEA Overview COVID Options Europe Supersapiens Sub ClubIM EMEA Sold Out Open EMEA 2023 Open EMEA 2022 Marketing Manager AT/CH Country PagesVeloskill Masterclass Choose Your Experience Marketing Contractor • North America Updates COVID Options NA • Oceania 2022 Promotions • Orbitz Guidelines Requests Web Info • Smart Programs • OpeningsNA2021 • VIP Pass • Momentum Kona Inspired • IRONMAN Web Requests • 70.3 WC Deferral • IM WC DeferralC • M WC Deferral • OpeningsNA2022 • Programs Class of All World Athlete • IM World Champ Life • IM Wisconsin 20 Years • Quest for Kona • Open Asia 2022 Speed Test • Become One 2022 • IM703WorldChampionship • Early Benefits Hospitality Mexico Hospitality Mexico • Early Benefits • Become One Set a Target Community Connection Make a Plan Learn, Learn, Learn • 70.3 Early Benefits • Early Benefits Oceania • Qatar Airlines Kona Community Road Closures Volunteers Live Aloha Events Course Maps Transportation • Transfers/Withdrawals • Women for Tri Tools & Resources World Championships Women of IRONMAN Women for Tri Voices • Oceania Kona 505 Login • Help • Home • Terms of Use • Intellectual Property • Personal-Information • Privacy Policy EMEA Event Policy • Transparency Coverage Unsolicited Ideas • Training Videos • IRONMAN Life Featured Featured 2 Featured 3 Training Swim Bike Run Racing Lifestyle Travel Nutrition Off-Season Profiles + Inspiration Gear Sponsored Humans of HOKA Videos 40th Anniversary News For Admins – All news Personal-Information Women for Tri TestHome Kone Races • IRONMAN Africa Asia Europe North America Oceania South America • IRONMAN 70.3 Africa Asia Europe North America Oceania South America • 5150 Triathlon Series Africa Asia Europe North America South America • View All Races • Executive Challenge XC Events Kona Slots 70.3 World Slots FAQ XC Results Photo Gallery • Additional Events Kalmar Mini Tri 4:18:4 Copenhagen 4:18:4 Elsinore Company Triathlon 4:18:4 Erkner 4:18:4 Jönköping • Discontinued Races IRONMAN IRONMAN 70.3 Triathlon Series IRONKIDS • Live • Races on Tap • Pro Race Results Archived Coverage Athlete Tracker App • Finish Line Cams Training Programs • Become One Class Of • All World Athlete Age Group Rankings Historical Rankings TriClubs Benefits Global Rankings TriClub Championships Register a Club Find a Club Clubs Incomplete Data • IRONMAN Legacy • Women for Tri Resources • Smart Program Athlete Smart Return Pledge Return Tips Safe Return Guidelines Swim Smart Cycle Smart Racing in the Heat • IRONMAN Life • Rules + Policies Competition Rules Policies Transfers/Withdrawals • Anti-Doping Substances Testing Sanctions & Statistics FAQ Contact Pro Athletes Volunteer Virtual Club Connect About IRONMAN Group HistoryHall of Fame • Contact Us • Series Partners United States Europe Oceania Asia Canada South Africa



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YOUR PERFECT POST-RACE RECOVERY WEEK: 5 ESSENTIALS

By David Landers, 08/31/17, 9:00AM EDT

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Before you kick back in your compression socks and write your race report, understand the why, how, and what for crafting a perfect recovery week.

This article is presented by Compressport.

another athlete's recovery routine.

Recovery matters to Australia's two-time IRONMAN 70.3 world champion, Melissa Hauschildt. "If you don't spend time recovering, you will not absorb the training and won't get the results you are after," she says.

"In my opinion, recovery is the most important part of the training," echoes Victor Del Corral, a multiple IRONMAN champion from Spain. "There can't be an improvement in any discipline without good recovery." (Remember that using compression during training also has an effect on the recovery process.) IRONMAN certified coach Susan Sotir offers a holistic argument for taking a time out after a hard effort: "Planned recovery is important for the muscles to heal, for the inflammation that a hard race leaves to be cleared and function restored to

normal levels, and for the mind to recognize that there is a break," says Sotir who coaches at Breakthrough Performance Coaching and holds a Ph.D. in Sport and Exercise Psychology. "Or, a little less nerdy: the body and mind need time." Make it personal

Swiss athlete Ruedi Wild is one of the several professional triathletes who plan and customize not only their training blocks but rest phases, too. After hitting the podium at this year's IRONMAN Switzerland, IRONMAN 70.3 Dubai and IRONMAN 70.3 Subic Bay Philippines, Wild's attention to personalized recovery is paying off. "I always take the time to properly recover. It's not only physical recovery but mental recovery too, which is very important," he says.

IRONMAN and IRONMAN 70.3 world champion Leanda Cave takes one day off after Olympic or IRONMAN 70.3 events and three days off after an IRONMAN. On those days, she heads to the pool to "float around as I use it like aqua therapy." The British pro triathlete also schedules massage once the muscle soreness has subsided. Del Corral lets his body tell him how long his recovery should be before resuming training. "Physically, I'm used to recovering fast. Sometimes I can be training eight or ten days after an IRONMAN, but other times, I need almost three weeks to

be ready again." The key is to tune into what your body and mind need to repair from the last triathlon and prepare for the next. "Some athletes recover better from active recovery such as doing light swim, bike, run in the days post-race. Some athletes need complete recovery with very little physical exertion. And some athletes need to get away from the sport in their recovery phase to mentally recover," explains Hauschildt. "Once you work out what works for you, stick with it and don't try to copy



Training in compression gear also promotes post-activity recovery.

1) Compression clothing

5 Essentials for Recovery Week

There's no doubt that racing an IRONMAN pushes a body to its physiological limits, and the pros turn to compression apparel during their recovery weeks for a faster healing of stressed muscles.

"I love to put compression gear on my legs straight after a race or after a hard session of training," adds Del Corral. "They help 'clean' my legs, making them feel lighter and less tired."

Cave says that her compression gear facilitates a quick recovery, and the better she executes recovery, the sooner she can return to training and racing.

Triathletes describe feeling immediate well-being, lightness, and strength in their muscles when they pull on compression gear. "My blood is pumping in a more and better way with the positive benefit being recovery," says Wild.

From socks to arm sleeves, there are now more apparel options targeting different muscles that endure the most stress and vibration during an IRONMAN. For example, Cave, Del Corral, Hauschildt, and Wild all wear Compressport's Full Leg sleeves. Covering the calves, hamstrings, and quadriceps, these sleeves drain away toxins and restrict inflammation throughout the part of the body critical to a triathlete's success.

Whether returning home or jetsetting to their next race, pro triathletes often travel during the recovery week, and compression gear goes with them.

"I wear these around the house after hard workouts or under my jeans if I have to be out and about," says Cave.

"Travel is a big one," says Cave. "Wearing travel socks and tights can make an enormous difference in how I feel leading into an event."

Sotir agrees. "For situations like plane flights or long car drives, where circulation can be potentially aided by compression garments, I like to see them incorporated as well."

2) Sleep

Sleep is a key ingredient for a successful recovery week. Hauschildt boosts her recovery by sleeping in Compressport's Full Leg compression sleeves.

Sleep and rest are crucial for Wild's speedy recovery, and he squeezes more restorative shut-eye into his day by napping. "My routine is that I always have a 10 to 20-minute nap after lunchtime. After taking a 10 to 20-minute nap, it doesn't take too long to get back to normal level, especially if you have coffee."

3) Family and friends

Over time, triathletes learn how to stay connected to family and friends despite the time and energy demanded by the sport. Del Corral, for instance, keeps tabs on his friends through easy bike rides during intense training blocks. Recovery, however, is an optimal time for triathletes to give relationships proper attention.

For Cave, that means a party.

"I like to arrange a social event. It's not so much about me, but about them. I've had enough of me by the time I get to the end of a race, and I want to share a drink and some good food with fun conversation, preferably not talking about triathlon!"

Keeping personal connections strong has race-day advantages too, according to Hauschildt. "If you get too caught up in your training and racing and forget about family and friends, you can underperform as the pressure to win becomes too great—as that is all you have in your life."

Sotir believes that a triathlete's ability to fully take advantage of recovery depends on their social circle and advises triathletes to interact with individuals who appreciate the context and significance of a triathlon, not exclusively its finish time. "The voices who matter are the ones who understand what you did, where you did it and what it took for you to get where you did."

4) Nutrition

Excluding a celebratory beer (or milkshake) and burger, keeping a healthy diet during recovery is important, and the pros only tweak their typical training menus to maintain a steady intake of nutrition.

Both Cave and Hauschildt describe their training and recovery diets as very similar. "I'll crave high fat and low sugar foods but this is usually just the day of the race and maybe the next day or two," adds Hauschildt.

After eating a lot of carbs in the week preceding an IRONMAN, Del Corral increases his protein and decreases carb intake during recovery, as does Wild who also adds more healthy fats to his plate.

5) Athletic assessment

Besides nourishing the body, recovery is a time for checking in on life priorities, identifying what needs attention besides training, assessing an IRONMAN performance, and bringing future goals into better focus.

How a triathlete processes their recent race impacts future performances. "I like to write up a race report after each race, good or bad. This is my way of going back over my race and figuring out what I did well and what I didn't do so well and what I need to work on," says Hauschildt.

Because athletes tend to concentrate on what they find enjoyable, i.e. their strengths, they avoid what they dislike, which often is what needs improvement. "A race will always reveal your weakness and what you've neglected during training. If you can acknowledge these things and work on them once the race is over, you will become a better athlete for it." "Whether you have a good or bad race, the physical recovery period is usually the same," explains Hauschildt. "It's usually after a bad race that the mind needs more mental recovery time. This may be getting away, doing things completely

different to 'swim, bike, run' and hanging out with non-athletes." After a race, Del Corral typically sets aside four or five days before he analyzes his performance and begins to think about the next. "It's very important to take a few days off, because just after the race, your mind is not clear. You need to close

a topic before to start with the next and, in my opinion, if you are realist with yourself then everything is easy," says Del Corral. It's worth it

It's important to keep these in mind since a triathlete's overzealous nature or nagging self-doubt can undermine a planned break. "The lure of a training session with friends or just keeping to your routine can be strong," warns Sotir. Wild advises triathletes to be patient after a race and not jump back in too early. "It takes much more confidence to do a recovery week," he says, "than to train in the same way, week by week."

Hauschildt offers another compelling reason to craft a perfect post-IRONMAN recovery week.

"Neglecting the recovery phase means all work and no play."

David Landers is a freelance writer with a passion for triathlon and travel. He lives in Vancouver, BC.

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