



REST & RECOVERY

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Rest and Recovery



INTRODUCTION

In this edition, we are going to look at an often neglected aspect of health and fitness... Rest and Recovery. Let's take a look at why it's important and what improvements we can make in this area.

We all know the importance of training correctly and pushing ourselves in the gym. Sometimes what we forget is just how important it is to rest and have recovery strategies that will allow us to keep training hard and make a big difference to how we look and feel.

First, let's look at the importance of **Sleep**.

The general consensus amongst health experts is that we need around 8 hours of sleep each night. Some people need less and some may need more, it's an individual thing.

One thing that is certain is that it's not just the amount of sleep that we get that matters, the quality of that sleep is just as important.



We've all had nights where we were in bed for 8 hours and yet we woke up frequently. When we did get out of bed in the morning, we felt less than refreshed. On the other hand, perhaps you've had a solid 6 hours of uninterrupted sleep and felt fine.

A good night's sleep is important in the regulation of hormones that affect our appetite. If we get a poor night's sleep, it may make us more likely to over eat.

Let's take a look at some of the ways we can improve our sleep.

Sleep "hygiene"

This refers to keeping a regular bedtime which gives us enough time between going to bed and the time we need to wake up. This is not always possible with a busy lifestyle, but is something we can all work on.

A light box can be a useful device, especially in the winter months when the mornings are darker. Just 20 minutes sat in front of a light box while you have breakfast will tell your brain that it's daytime and this will help to regulate your circadian rhythm.

Avoiding things that stimulate us

Caffeine

Caffeine is an obvious one. We are all very different in our ability to process caffeine. Some people are able to drink caffeine in the evening without it seeming to affect their sleep, whereas others have to be careful and cut caffeine out either completely or have a cut off point earlier in the day.

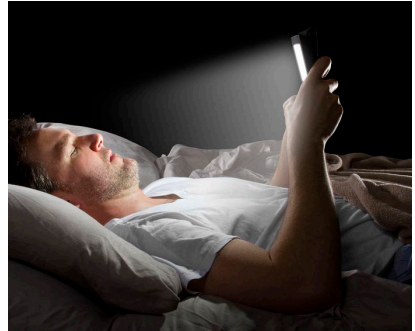
If you're struggling with your sleep and you drink a lot of caffeine, then reducing your intake or having a cut off time is one of the first things to try.



Blue light

In the same way that a light box tells our brains that it's daytime and promotes wakefulness, so does the light emitted from phones, computers, laptops and tablets.

Stopping the use of these devices 1-2 hours before bedtime is a wise thing to do. If your work requires you to be on such devices later on in the evening then consider installing an application which reduces the blue light output of the device.



An example of an app which can do this is f.lux, which uses your geographical location and automatically reduces blue light output from your device in the evenings.

De-stressing and relaxation

Stress makes sleep more difficult and so we need to think about how we can reduce our stress and make time to purposefully relax.

Hard training puts stress on the body but gentle activities such as yoga, stretching, walking in nature, dancing to music, painting or any other activities which can take the focus off our stressors and onto something we enjoy, can be very relaxing.



When we are stressed, our bodies use up more magnesium, and so a high quality magnesium supplement may be a good idea. Magnesium is available in capsules, topical sprays and even in bath salts. A warm magnesium bath is a wonderful way to help you relax!

What other ways can we aid our recovery from exercise?

Foam rolling - this has been demonstrated to reduce stiffness, muscle soreness and increase flexibility. Just 5 minutes of foam rolling at some point during the day after training will make a difference.



Massage - Getting a massage from a professional sports therapist or masseuse can be very relaxing. Why not book yourself in for one when you're feeling a bit uptight? Aromatherapy massage can be especially relaxing. Deep tissue work, on the other hand, is not as relaxing but can assist recovery.

Nutrition

When we exercise, we cause damage to our muscles. This is an essential part of the adaptive process our body needs to go through if we want it to change shape.



But after the damage has been done, it's important that we give our body the right nutrition to allow it to grow and repair.

Getting enough protein, spread throughout the day is key. Aim for 3-5 protein-containing meals.

Carbohydrates are used as a fuel source during moderate to high rep resistance training and so it makes sense to replenish your carbohydrate stores so that your muscles are then ready to perform well in your next session.

The amount and type of carbohydrates you need will vary depending on your goals, muscle mass and activity levels.

Carbohydrates can also help us sleep due to the serotonin release that accompanies carbohydrate consumption.

An all-round good diet is necessary for recovery. A diet which consists of a good variety of colours, vitamins and minerals is essential for optimal health and performance. Eat your veggies!



Hydration

Hydration is important, especially when we consider that our muscles are around 70% water.

Being dehydrated causes our bodies stress.

Make sure you are getting enough fluids throughout the day and not too much caffeine!

The standard advice of 2 litres of water a day is not enough for everyone. The bigger you are and the more active you are, the more water you require for optimal health and performance.

A better rule is one litre for every 25kg of bodyweight. So someone weighing 100kg should aim for 4 litres of fluid each day.

