

Off Season Training

Health Notes For The Off Season

By Dr. T. P. Turner

Couch time! The racing season is over and the rest of the healing season has begun. Most of us end the season tired and at least a little banged up. Unless you are feeling one hundred percent healthy, I recommend that you give yourself three weeks off the bike.

Stop that! I hate whining! Find an activity that will help maintain your aerobic base and that uses your muscles in a very different way than cycling. Once you feel rested and the knee pains, back pains, etc. are gone, you can get back on the bike and start doing your winter "fat burning" rides.

It seems that most people misunderstand this term. The primary purpose of these rides is not weight loss, although there may be some. The purpose of fat burning rides is to teach your body to burn fats more efficiently. This is building your aerobic base. It is what Lydiard had in mind when he coined the term LSD (long slow distance).

The aerobic system can burn fat in the presence of oxygen. The more efficiently it does this, the more your glycogen stores are spared and the more effective your interval training and racing will be later in the season.

Another important factor in burning fats efficiently is diet. Not all bodies are the same and you may have to modify some of these concepts to maximize your results, but here are some basic ideas to start:

1) Drink plenty of water. Five or six glasses per day is about right for the average person. However, riding will raise your need significantly. You might try weighing before and after rides to make sure you rehydrate. Water weighs eight pounds per gallon and you can figure out your extra need from there.

Also, try to keep your urine clear and light colored. Dehydration will make it darker and more cloudy. Do not substitute soft drinks, tea, coffee or alcohol for water. These are all diuretics and may result in a net loss of water. When drinking fruit juices dilute them two or three to one to ensure that they do not trigger an insulin response.

2) Avoid sugar, sucrose, dextrose, maltose, glucose and corn syrup. These concentrated, simple carbohydrates cause the release of large amounts of insulin into the system. Insulin pushes the sugar into the cells and eventually leads to low blood sugar causing fatigue and cravings (usually for more sweets). Insulin also converts almost half of your carbohydrates into stored fat.

Insulin also inhibits the production of glucagon and growth hormone. Glucagon promotes the burning of both fats and carbohydrates for energy and growth hormone is necessary for muscle growth and development.

3) Avoid trans fats including: hydrogenated, partially hydrogenated oils, and fried foods. These fats interfere with normal fat metabolism. They cause prostaglandin imbalances which increase inflammatory responses.

Hydrogenation is a chemical process which artificially saturates oils prolonging shelf life and makes them solid at room temperature. it is used in the manufacture of margarine, peanut butter, cheese crackers and cookies to name only a few. Read labels and use butter, olive oil, canola oil when possible.

4) Use whole grains instead of refined, "enriched" grains as much as is practical. Whole grains contain many more nutrients and significantly more fiber than refined grains. this does not mean you can never eat regular pasta again, but it does mean that while pasta is an empty calorie and leads to the depletion of micronutrients.

5) Eat a balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fats. 40%, 30%, 30% by calorie count is a good balance for most people. Remember that carbohydrates and proteins yield 4 calories per gram and that fats yield 9 calories per gram. When counting grams in food this works out to: for each gram of carbohydrates, you need 3/4 gram of protein and 1/3 gram of fats. I know that the idea that we need fat is new to some and we will discuss fats in detail in a future article.

6) Eat at least three servings of cooked vegetables per day. Variety is important to provide a balance nutrients.

7) Eat regularly. Bodies like routine. whether you do best with 3 meals per day or 5 small meals, eat them around the same time of the day. Your body will be ready to digest and absorb out of habit .

8) Keep junk food to a minimum. If you need a snack between meals try fresh fruit, an egg or raw almonds or cashews (roasting makes the oils rancid).

If you are fond of desserts, save them for special occasions. if you are fond of soft drinks, save them for late in long, hard rides. They have no nutrients and have way too much sugar for regular use, but under the special conditions of extended hard efforts the caffeine and sugar will give you a boost.

These recommendations are for the off season but our nutritional needs change only a little during the training and racing season. We need extra carbohydrates when regularly stressing out anaerobic system to replace depleted glycogen stores. We can best get these by taking in high carbohydrate bars, drinks or foods during and immediately after hard efforts.

These general concepts should help you maintain the energy and focus needed to achieve your training and racing goals.