Post Ride Strategy – Base Camps

To understand the importance of post ride recovery you must first understand that when you exercise you actually stress your muscles and damage them (in a good way). Then, during the post exercise phase, your body adapts to this stress and becomes more efficient, in order to ensure that the next time it is placed under the same stress it copes with it better.

Therefore, assisting your body with this rebuilding and adaptation is vital to building fitness and reaping the rewards of the effort you've just put in.

In summary – skimping on your recovery strategy wastes the valuable time you spend on the bike.

1. Refuel

Refuel as soon as possible after stopping exercise. Most people will not have managed to consume sufficient calories whilst on the bike and muscle glycogen (stored glycogen is what powers your muscles) will be depleted. Remember you're eating to recharge muscles for the next ride as well as recover from the ride you've just done.

There is evidence that in the first 20-30 minutes after stopping exercise the body converts carbohydrate to muscle glycogen at a rate up to 3 times faster than normal. This is known as the 'glycogen repletion window'.

So to make the most of this open window: eat a high carbohydrate snack totaling about 0.5g per lb of bodyweight as soon as possible after finishing the ride.

Some examples of carbohydrate content:

- Large 125g plain bagel = approx. 70g of carbohydrate
- Sports recovery drinks are approx. 60-75% carbs (depending on brand) therefore a typical 40g recovery drink powder sachet will be about 25g – 30g of carbohydrate
- Breakfast cereals (approx 70% carbs) = approx 35g carbs in a 50g bowl
- 1 cup of 2% milk = 13g carbs
- Small 100g banana = 23g carbs

So – if you weigh 135lb you should consume about 70g straight away e.g.

- A bowl of cereal & milk + banana; or
- A large bagel; or
- A recovery drink & large banana

This glycogen repletion window doesn't close completely after 20-30 minutes but the faster absorption & conversion gradually slows over the next few hours. Therefore a second meal with similar carbohydrate should be consumed within 2 hours of stopping exercise.

Some studies have suggested that protein should be included in post ride recovery to assist with muscle rebuilding. However the evidence of its benefit immediately after a ride is not conclusive. The main requirement of the body is to immediately replace lost glycogen and fuel the adaptation process, therefore your focus

should be on carbohydrate replacement. A healthy diet should ensure that sufficient protein is consumed unless an intense weight lifting or body building program is being followed.

(You may also want to refer to the CCSD handout on nutrition).

2. Rehydrate

Drink plenty of water. A general guideline is 1 liter of fluid per pound of body weight lost while riding. If you can't weigh yourself simply drink 500ml of water as soon as possible then keep a bottle of water with you for the next few hours and keep sipping it steadily.

3. Replace Lost Electrolytes

Replacing lost electrolytes is particularly important if you have lost a lot of fluid through sweating. The CCSD handout on nutrition provides more guidance on the loss of sodium loss during exercise.

Try and get other electrolytes, minerals and vitamins through eating a balanced diet. The main electrolyte to replace immediately after exercise is pure and simple sodium chloride (salt). Potassium loss is usually much less than sodium and additionally, the use of potassium supplementation can be dangerous.

Salt replacement can be either through a recovery drink or by consuming a salty snack.

4. Wind Down

Begin to wind down on the way home. Taking the last 5-10 minutes at a slower pace and spin your legs. This phase of the ride should feel like barely any effort at all (obviously if you finish the ride on a climb this may not be possible!).

If you can wind down at the end of a ride, this is an ideal time to start the post ride refueling and rehydration. Your calorie burn is significantly less as you're riding at minimal effort but blood flow to your muscles is still higher than normal. If you have energy drink left in your bottle consume the remainder at this point, or eat an energy bar.

You should also remember that during a 'base training' phase you should not finished a ride exhausted. These are base miles and if you are wiped out after a ride you are probably pushing yourself too hard. Over reaching is necessary part of training your body and increasing fitness but going too hard every day will undo the hard effort you have put in.

5. Stretch

If you follow a stretching program try and do this as soon as you get off the bike, whilst muscles are still warm.

Combine this with refueling at the same time if possible i.e. stretch and consume a recovery drink concurrently.

If you're the sort of person who immediately gets swept away with bike maintenance, showering, other tasks etc then try to stretch before you get off the bike e.g. do a few laps of the car park / up and down the street and perform a few on the bike stretches (watch out for cars though!).

However, note that there is some evidence to suggest that athletes gain only limited benefits from stretching and flexibility exercises – therefore don't skimp on other more important recovery tasks in order to cram it in.

6. Get Clean

Get out of sweaty kit to prevent skin infections, which can result in saddle soreness. Application of a mild antiseptic / tea tree based gel or medicated baby powder can help any infected hair follicles, whilst diaper rash cream can sooth chafed skin.

Soaking in a hot bath can also help to open pores and relieve any clogging.

7. Rest and Relax

Lying with your legs up can help to drain fluid that builds up in your leg muscles during cycling… and it always feels good to lie down!

If you're tired – sleep. Any pro rider will tell you that a post ride nap can make all the difference if you're riding the next day.

Try to resist the temptation to do work / take calls etc. The aim of training camp is to behave like a full time pro rider for the camp duration. Post ride is important recovery time.

Some people like to use compression kit. Whilst there is not yet conclusive evidence of its effectiveness post ride it can be comfortable clothing and also mentally signals that you are in 'recovery mode' rather than getting straight into casual wear and starting to check work emails.

8. Post ride bike maintenance

When you're refueled and rested turn to you're bike and ensure it's ready for the next day.

However, where camps / rides are supported by a camp mechanic you should already have alerted them to any bike issues you have / taken your bike to them as soon as the ride is over.

9. Ride analysis

Download data if you've gathered it but don't obsess over your power output / ride stats etc.

Recap on what went well during the ride and what you've learnt and consider what areas you want to develop further beyond base training camp.

Conclusion

1. You should feel tired but not wiped out – these are base miles

2. Refuel within 20-30 minutes

3. Refuel again within 2-3 hours

4. Get out of kit and get clean

5. Be a pro and get some rest

References

1. Panzera, R. (2010). *Cycling Fast: Winning Essentials for Cycling Competition*. Human Kinetics: Champaign, Ill.

2. Trehearn, T.L. & Buresh, R.J. (2009). Sit-and-reach flexibility and running economy of men and women collegiate distance runners. Department of Health and Human Performance, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska, USA.