

Benefits of recovery

Exercise is awesome for your health, but it puts stress on the body. The rest and recovery period after you break a sweat is when your body adapts to those stresses and you make fitness gains. Here's why a post-workout cooldown matters:



It brings down your heart rate gradually

During an intense workout your heartrate can increase dramatically. Stop abruptly and you'll jolt your blood circulation and may feel lightheaded.



It recharges your muscles

A simple cooldown routine can ward off soreness by delivering oxygen and nutrients so your muscles can recover faster.



It helps prevent injury

Ending a workout with a few gentle stretches increases the range of motion in your joints, relaxes the muscles, and brings your body back to full and normal function.

Determine if you're pushing yourself too hard

Ignore your body's need to rest and recover long enough and you might find that exercising's many benefits get turned upside down: Your body gets the wrong cues and begins to pump out excess stress hormones, kick-starting the classic flight-or-fight response. That can lead to everything from unwanted weight gain to a weakened immune system.

5 COMMON SIGNS YOU NEED MORE RECOVERY

1

You're exhausted, not energized.

2

Your muscles feel sore* for days.

3

Your strength and endurance is going down, not up.

4

You have trouble sleeping

5

You're getting more colds.

*Minor aches are normal when you start training, or when you kick it up a notch.

Develop a post-workout routine

Along with slowing your pace for three to 10 minutes before completing your workout, **you'll want to end your session with a few** key stretches that target all of your major muscle groups. **Get started with these beginner-friendly moves; hold each for 30 to 60 seconds per side.**



Hamstring stretch

Sit on the ground with one leg out in front of you and the other folded with the sole of your opposite foot on your inner thigh. Lean forward, reaching for your toes (or shin) on your outstretched leg.



Glutes & hip stretch

Hold onto the back of a chair for balance, cross one ankle over the opposite thigh and sink your hips down like sitting in a chair, until you feel a gentle stretch in the side of your butt.



Quadricep stretch

Holding onto the back of a chair (or tree) for balance, lift one leg behind you, grab your foot and gently pull it toward your butt.



Shoulder & chest stretch

Stand with your back facing a wall, about a foot away from it. Reach one arm back and place your palm and forearm on the wall (your thumb should be up). Gently twist your torso away from the wall until you feel a stretch in your chest and shoulder.

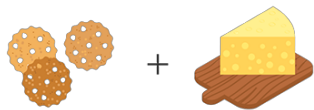
Follow the 3 R's of recovery nutrition

The foods you eat and the fluids you drink can greatly influence how quickly you recover from a workout. To replenish your energy, have a snack or meal that meets these three R's of recovery nutrition:

- 1 **REFUEL with carbohydrates.** Carbs provide your body and brain with the fuel needed to recover and adapt to your training sessions.
- 2 **REBUILD with protein.** Protein and amino acids help maximize muscle repair.
- 3 **REHYDRATE.** Fluids can minimize cramping and muscle fatigue. Opt for plain water or a sports drink for a hit of electrolytes.

CARB + PROTEIN POWER COMBOS

Try these foods to get a hit of both carbs and protein to speed your recovery. Aim for three or four grams of carbs for every one gram of protein.



Whole-grain crackers cheese



Greek yogurt & fresh fruit



Whole-grain pita wedges, veggies, hummus dip

Sleep more, sleep better

Sleep is one of the most important parts of an effective recovery program: It's when the body produces the hormones responsible for stimulating muscle protein synthesis, which is critical for repairing muscle tissue. If you don't get enough shut-eye, your body never has a chance to fully recover.

People who get less than eight hours of sleep per night are nearly twice as likely to suffer a sports injury than people who sleep eight or more hours a night.

CALL IT AN (EARLY) NIGHT

Go to bed 15 minutes earlier than your usual time. Do not spend the last 15 minutes of the day looking at your phone. Late night screen time will hinder quality sleep.



Stick with this new bedtime for a week, then add more sleep by turning in 15 minutes earlier the following week.



Continue increasing your sleep each week until you're getting seven to eight hours a night.

Take it easy

While it's important to get in some kind of physical activity every day, every workout should not be a high-intensity one. A good rule of thumb is to allow two days between high-intensity workouts, mixing in medium- and low-intensity days to let your body recover.

Any of these low-key activities are ideal for your rest day.



- Take a leisurely 30-minute walk
- Go for an easy bike ride
- Try a non-stressful yoga class
- Have a dip in the pool