



## WORKING HARD AT RECOVERY

By Tim Cusick, USAC Coach

March is always a challenging time for cyclists and endurance athletes. This is the month that athletes in the snow side of the country are looking to polish off their foundation training and those blessed by sun and warmer weather are starting to add real intensity to prepare for the upcoming race season. This typically means March is one of the highest volume months of the year in hours and intensity compared to fitness. As you gear up for this big month, you are challenged with a lot of questions; should I push one more month of big foundation training? How much intensity can I begin to add? Am I starting to over-train? How much can I handle? The key to all these questions lies within your ability to focus on maximizing recovery so you can handle the increase in intensity and workload.

For my athletes I typically discuss five key tips to focus on recovery. By “working hard” at recovery, you can better prepare your body to handle this big volume training month. Here are my five tips;

1. **EAT SMART** – It is so important in high volume months that you eat right. This means a quality blend of timing, quantity and content. First of all, make sure you eat before, during and immediately after all higher volume (over 70 TSS or 1 hour) training days. March is not the time to be cutting weight as eating better for today’s ride starts the recovery process earlier and better prepares you for tomorrow. It is most important that you eat right after hard training sessions. Athletes should target a 4 to 1 ration of carbohydrates to protein, targeting 1.25 grams of carbs per kilogram of body weight. This means a 150 lbs athlete should target consuming 85 grams of carbs and 21 grams of protein immediately after training. Don’t forget that what you eat is also as important. Focus on natural foods, lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and foods that have little or minimal processing and that are low in saturated fats. If you don’t recognize the ingredients on the nutritional label; don’t eat it.
2. **COMPRESSION** – I am a big fan of compression as a recovery aid. Compression speeds up blood flow to and from the legs, clears lactate and speeds muscle recovery. I suggest that athletes use compression after shower and meal for 2 – 3 hours. In very high volume training weeks I also suggest sleeping in them (if you can). There are plenty of brands out there now to choose from, look closely at the material, the stronger the more compression. Personally, I like Zoot’s product the best.
3. **SELF MASSAGE** – Yep, rub yourself! You cannot under-estimate how giving yourself a 15 – 20 minute leg massage will benefit your recovery. Again, there are numerous products out there to help, from sticks to balls. I like roller sticks. Here is a suggested technique. After eating post ride meal and shower, put compression tights or sock on then lay on floor next to bed. Put your feet up on the bad to create good leg elevation. Begin by rolling your feet in circles in both

directions then start working on your calves. If using a massage roller (or the household rolling pin) massage down towards your core flushing lactate from muscles. From your calves move to your hamstrings, then your quads. This will keep flushing lactate out and into your system. Don't forget your glutes. Typically this can be done well in as little as 15 minutes.

4. **HYDRATE** – Ok, this seems like a simple one but we all know that we probably don't get enough water in our busy lives and focusing on this in high volume months will help flush the system while speeding recovery. Make sure you replace the water that you lose to sweat during workouts. Weigh yourself before and after your workout; the weight you lose after workouts is almost all water weight that needs to be replaced.
5. **SUPPLEMENTS** – Ok, before I give my thoughts I am not a doctor or certified nutritionist. This is just some of my learned experience over the years.
  - a. **Antioxidants are king** – The amount of free-radicals in our bodies during high volume training is significant and antioxidants are the counter. I suggest both a diet rich in natural antioxidants (selected fruits, vegetables and meats) and antioxidant supplements available from numerous sources, including your local drug store.
  - b. **Iron** – Ok, let me first point out that Iron is a non-soluble mineral that can build up in your system if you take too much. There is plenty of research on this on the internet. Iron is crucial to the development of red blood cells and recovery and as endurance athletes we burn (lose) a lot. I suggest the ferrous version taken 3 – 5 times a week based on workload. Also, try to take iron with foods that are rich in Vitamin C as that helps absorption.
  - c. **Daily Multi-Vitamin** – This tip always gets some arguments as a lot of people will say that you can get all the daily vitamins you need though good diet. That may be true but under the high volume strain you are putting your body, you can never know which vitamin you need more of and when you need it. Think about it like your body is eating from the buffet. You don't know if today it will be hungry for vitamin B or vitamin D or if it will be hungry at all. That being said, you want to make sure your buffet is stocked daily so if your body needs it, it is there.

Working hard on your recovery by eating well, drinking lots of water, using compression and massage techniques will set the stage for the high volume intensity workouts of March and boost your training and fitness for the upcoming season.