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[NOTE: Some sentiments contained within "What We're Reading" articles may not strictly conform with Simple Again's nutritional outlook. We read articles containing opposing information all the time and derive our nutritional philosophies from the latest science, the opinions of experts worldwide and our anecdotal experiences in the field. We keep an open mind and a strong affinity for fact-based evidence to help make the world of nutrition "Simple Again" for you.]

5 Offseason Rules to Help You Refocus on Strength and Core

As a seasoned endurance athlete, it is unlikely you take an extended break from training. You know that regular consistent exercise is important for health and maintaining a basic level of fitness. You probably also miss the training if you have to take more than a few days off for any particular reason. You enjoy being fit!

Knowing that, it is appropriate to break each training season into phases or periods, aka periodization. You can read a short article about the different

periodization phases [here](#) and watch a short video [here](#). A full-blown periodized program doesn't work for everyone, but a period of downtime should be built into an athlete's overall training program.

The offseason (transition and/or prep phases) would be the two to three months after your big race, or the period just before you get back into 'serious' training for the next round of races. The offseason is a good time to take it a little easier and give yourself a mental break. It's nice to catch up on your real life duties and remind your kids and spouse you're still a member of the family!

It's also a great time to refocus on areas that fall into neglect during your harder periods of training. For most endurance athletes, strength and conditioning is the first thing to go during the busier phases of training. When you're young, you can get away with skipping out on your strength sessions with minimal consequences. As you age, your strength and flexibility both fade, so maintaining these becomes more essential. This is not just from a maximal strength aspect but also from a preventing injury point of view. Those of you who've already been to the physical therapist know that, for the most part, the imbalances/issues your therapist noticed will return if you ever stop the exercises he or she prescribed. That means you need to do these forever.

If you've never been injured, count your blessings. While not all injuries are related to a lack of strength or flexibility, many are exacerbated by such.

Strength, core, conditioning. These are all words meant to describe the act of improving muscle function. Some forms of strength training, like maximum weight isolated bicep curls, for example, are not very helpful for most endurance athletes. Endurance athletes should focus on exercises that are specific to their sport and on training the 'core' or trunk muscles to improve power transfer to the limbs. There are a ton of ways do accomplish this.



A few general rules follow.

1. Free weights are better than machines as they force you to balance while exercising. Fixed machines remove this aspect of training. Machines may be good for certain rehab exercises or injured athletes.
2. Don't start out with maximal efforts. Spend a few weeks at two to three sessions per week doing moderate intensity general exercises with a few sport-specific exercises. Just like running, you don't run a marathon on your first day out. You have to build up your soft tissue resilience and muscle adaptation.
3. Closed chain exercises are better than open chain exercises for 'functional' strength improvement. A closed chain exercise (hand or foot is fixed in place) involves multiple muscle groups and joints, whereas an open chain exercise isolates fewer muscles and less joints. Re: pull-up vs. a barbell single arm curl; squat vs. leg extension.
4. Trunk stability is super-duper important. Three exercises that are easy to accomplish anywhere target this — the plank, the bridge and bird-dog. You can do these at the office if need be and there are variations that can make the exercises more intense. A sample progression would be one minute as: a plank on the floor; a plank on the floor alternating leg raises; a plank on the floor alternating leg raises and slow push-ups; a plank with hands on an exercise ball; a plank with feet on the exercise ball...and so on. You can get pretty creative.
5. Plyometric training should definitely be included. This involves a quick movement from muscle extension to contraction. Plyometric exercises help develop muscle power via the quick extension-contraction. These can also be really tough so should be gradually introduced or reintroduced to your strength training plan. A basic and relatively easy plyo exercise is ankle jumps (quick vertical hops like you're jumping rope). Harder exercises are squat-jumps or burpies (squat-jump-push-up).

Now is the time to get back to it for most of the USA Triathlon population. We see your training updates, and we know you've been slacking!

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