

TRAINING CYCLES

Your training will be more effective if you follow a cycle, rather than training in the same way all the time. The aim is to have a 'wave' pattern in your schedule, so the workload (intensity x duration) builds up to a peak, and then drops back to a lower level. Training stimulates your body to adapt. Recovery allows your body to do all the construction and reconstruction work required by your training. If your performance is at a plateau, or you're lacking motivation, check your calendar to make sure you have a cycle of training/racing followed by recovery.

There are training cycles of varying length, from a week up to a year.

First of all, take at least one day off per week. Training every day is counterproductive: your body has no time to adapt to your training. On the other hand, too many days off doesn't help either. Some kind of exercise five or six days per week is optimal, but running six days per week is asking for trouble for most of us. Try alternating your running days with cross-training days. Again, follow a wave pattern: build up to your hardest day, then take a day off, then start back with a fairly easy day and build up again.

The next cycle is over a four to six week period. Gradually increase your training workload for the first three (or five) weeks, and then have an easy week. Reduce your mileage by 50%, and cut out speed work for the week. Repeat this cycle throughout the year.

Finally there is the yearly cycle. Those of us who are not elite athletes don't really have a specific competition season, so we miss out on the off-season rest period. We train and race pretty much all year round. It's a good idea to have a rest from running once a year, maybe for two or three weeks. If you've done a particularly demanding race, the period immediately after that is a good choice. Otherwise, maybe take a rest during your main annual holiday. Stay active, but do something completely different and at a relaxed and enjoyable pace.