

## 9 Signs That You Might Have Done Too Much of a Good Thing

Cycling is a terrific activity for maintaining good health, but is it possible to get too much of a good thing? We do know that fitness is developed while resting – not while doing the sport that we love. As we cycle, we stimulate the body to super compensate when it rebuilds, but it can't rebuild effectively if it's fed a steady diet of stimulation. So, what are the signs that we all need to be aware of, in order to recognize when overtraining is happening?

1. **Diminished Performance** – You feel chronically fatigued with heavy legs and a weariness that sees you avoiding “that hill” or finding ways of avoiding windy sections of a route that you have loved to cycle in the past. If you do put in a titanic effort your recovery is very slow.
2. **Stalled Progress** – Suddenly a course that you have cycled in a certain time now takes longer or a hill that you could previously ride up in 4<sup>th</sup> gear now sees you grovelling up it in 2<sup>nd</sup> gear. The temptation is to train even harder or lift heavier weights, but again the problem isn't stimulation, but lack of recovery.
3. **Variable Waking Heart Rate** – If you aren't using a Heart Rate Monitor this will be impossible to determine. If you do use a HRM check to see if it will do Heart Rate Variability (HRV). Polar™ for example call this several names such as Fit Test/Own Index, Nightly Recharge etc. The body has 2 different branches of the nervous system associated with heart rate. The *parasympathetic* system is in control of heart rate when we are rested and recovered. In this state the timing between heartbeats will vary ever so slightly (we're talking milliseconds here) and that is a good thing. When we have low variability, with perhaps an elevated waking heart rate, the *sympathetic* branch of the nervous system is in control. It is an indication that your nervous system is not responding well to external stimulation. So variable is good – low variability is not so good.
4. **Emotional Volatility** – Have you become Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hide? Did you rip your ride partner a new one when they were 5 minutes late for the ride start? Are other emotion responses completely out-of-proportion to the situation? You may be overtrained.
5. **Reduced Sex Drive** - Has your libido taken a hit? Hormonal imbalance does happen when your body is under physical and emotional stress.
6. **High Perceived Exertion** – Have you had this happen? You feel as though you're really working hard on a ride only to look down at your cycling computer and see your numbers don't match your perceived effort. Your speed isn't as high as you were expecting, your heart rate is lower than you thought it would be, or your time on your commute is longer than usual. Now granted, you will notice these situations if you were on a particularly hard ride one day earlier and you see disappointing numbers on your commute the day after. But if those numbers are recurring ride after ride after ride – it's time to take a rest.
7. **Low Motivation** – You begin finding excuses or procrastinate about going out for a ride.
8. **Poor Sleep** – This may seem counterintuitive, but overtraining can lead to insomnia, disrupted sleep or just plain less restful sleep.
9. **Illness and Injury** – When your body is placed under continuous stress your immune system becomes weakened. So, you begin suffering more frequent illnesses and/or you take longer to recover from an illness. Often, injuries can become more frequent and take longer to heal. It's almost as if your body is crying out for a rest and if the mind won't cooperate, then the body will force rest upon you.

How do you wrestle this back to normal?

**Rest** – You've been digging yourself into a hole. The first step is to STOP DIGGING! The amount of rest required will be different for everyone. As you begin seeing a reversal of the symptoms mentioned above, you

know that you're moving in the right direction. You should begin feeling more motivated and most telling - your waking heart rate will become lower, and Heart Rate Variability will return.

**Get a Massage** – I find that getting a whole-body massage really kicks off my road to recovery. If your health plan doesn't cover therapeutic massage. Outfit yourself with a Tiger Tail roller, foam roller and massage ball, and do self-massage. Breaking up adhesions in the muscles enables you to recruit those fibres once again and will really make your return to cycling exhilarating.

**Try to achieve a better work/rest balance in your life** – You ended up being overtrained because you were trying to fit in too much. Be realistic about how much you can achieve in your cycling and find peace with that. You may wish to consult a sports coach to draw up a new realistic ride schedule.

**Re-examine your nutrition/hydration** – Most of us are continually fighting to keep our weight under control and cycling is part of that plan. However, in cutting back on our food intake we may end up short-changing our body of nutrients that are necessary for recovery and rebuilding. Again, you may want to discuss your diet with a dietician that specializes in athletic nutrition.

Being chronically dehydrated can really affect how your body performs. A difference of only 4% body weight in relation to hydration will result in a 20-30% loss in performance.

Give it a rest Dr. Jekyll – banish Mr./Ms. Hide to the has-been pile.