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Base Training.

How many triathletes do you know who are lazy about their training? Who really don't like to push it? Personally, I know not a one. As a group, triathletes are prone to overtraining as we always want to go faster and harder for longer.

Skipping the Base phase and jumping right into high intensity workouts (hills, intervals, sprints) greatly increases the risk of injury as the body is not adequately prepared for those stresses. You wanna be fast? Do your base training right.

The human body responds best to periodized training; varying intensity levels and training phases with planned periods of rest and recovery. Like a well built house, the body needs a firm and broad foundation upon which the rest of the house can sit: this foundation is your Base period. Base training builds a big, efficient engine: your cardiovascular system is strengthened and made more efficient; your musculoskeletal system is strengthened and prepared for the more intense workouts to come.

Base training guidelines

Muscular strength. Weights and base training go well together, as low to moderate intensity endurance training can help your muscles recover. Proper form and technique are vital for safe weight lifting, so please consult a professional.

Exercises to include are:

Leg presses, squats, step ups, lunges, and ham string curls.

Chest presses or pushups

Rows and bent arm pull downs

Moderate shoulder work (overhead presses, raises)

Abs and low back exercises

STRETCHING!

Endurance Training

Gradually build duration from 30-90 minutes (or longer, depending on your race distance), with drop back weeks planned every 3-4 weeks. Base training should be performed at about 75% effort. Stay within zones 1-2: a conversational pace that keeps lactate levels low and builds your tolerance to longer duration activity. Your slow twitch muscle fibers (which fatigue slowly and recover quickly) will strengthen and the body learns to conserve glycogen and improve fat metabolism – vital adaptations for the endurance athlete!

Having said that base training needs to be easy, recent studies are showing that it is wise to maintain some speed workouts in the schedule- so you could do some short speed intervals (30 to 90 secs) with 1-3 minutes recovery. This will prevent you from getting “flat”.

Skill Building

Swim: do drills that aid body position in the water, arm recovery/catch, efficient kick, and body rotation. An excellent source for these drills is Terry Laughlin's, Total Immersion.

Bike: focus on pedal mechanics with some spin-ups: increase your cadence to the maximum you can maintain without bouncing in the saddle.

Eliminate dead spots in your stroke with isolated leg drills: pedal with one leg only and maintain regular cadence and an even stroke for 30+ seconds.

Run: strides (increased foot turnover on a slight downhill) and pick ups (20 second accelerations during an endurance run) really help to improve your speed. Increase your cadence by counting your right foot strikes for 20 seconds, and aim to get 30. High turnover is associated with faster, more efficient running form. As you do these drills, focus on knee lift, body carriage, and the overall body mechanics associated with fast and efficient running.

A true base phase with low intensity endurance work and quality form drills will reap many benefits: less injuries and sickness, and increased speed and strength, so. . . . Happy training!