

Post-workout pointers to aid recovery

Exercise enthusiasts know that an effective workout does not end with your last rep or final second on the treadmill. What you do upon finishing a workout can go a long way toward aiding your recovery and making your exercise routine that much more effective. During a workout, muscle and tissue can suffer some damage, and what men and women do after such workouts can determine whether their muscles recover in time for the next workout or they struggle to rebuild. The following are a handful of post-workout activities for athletes looking for safe ways to aid their body's recovery.

- **Stretch.** Stretching after a workout aids muscle recovery. During a lengthy strength training workout, muscles contract quite often, leaving them in a shortened state at the end of your workout. If these muscles are not stretched once you complete your workout, you may suffer from stiffness and soreness later in the day or the following morning. Stretching helps the muscles return to their normal size, reducing the likelihood that you will suffer from stiffness and soreness while simultaneously kickstarting the body's recovery process.
- **Rehydrate your body.** Many people lose a considerable amount of fluid while exercising. Rehydrate the body with water after a workout so you do not suffer from symptoms of dehydration, which can include heart palpitations, muscle cramps and nausea. Avoid caffeinated beverages, including coffee and soda, after a workout, as caffeine promotes fluid loss.
- **Eat soon after working out.** Eating high-quality protein soon after a workout aids muscle recovery and growth. A protein shake, some peanut butter spread on a brown rice cake or some low-fat yogurt can provide a potent helping of protein that helps the body recover and restore itself for your next workout.
- **Take time to rest between workouts.** No matter how much energy you have after a workout, keep in mind that your body needs time to rest and recover. Muscles typically need one to two full days to recover after a workout, which is why trainers and other exercise professionals advise against working the same muscle group two days in a row or twice in three days. Rest is a part of your body's recovery process, so give your body at least 24 hours between workouts before you get back to working out.
- **Get adequate sleep.** As noted, muscle and tissue may suffer from slight tears during strength training exercises. However, when you sleep your immune system goes to work repairing the body, including those small muscle and tissue tears that may have occurred during your workout. Inadequate sleep does not give your body the time it needs to recover, and that can affect both your energy levels and the progress you make in the gym.

Workouts might be the focus of your fitness routine, but your post-workout behavior can go a long way toward determining the effectiveness of those workouts.

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