

The Best Recovery For Those Long Workouts? Swimming

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Your next workout may do more to help you bounce back than compression socks, ice baths, etc.

Triathletes do all kinds of things to accelerate muscle recovery after hard runs. They stretch, take ice baths, wear compression socks, get massages, strap on Normatec boots, drink recovery shakes, and so forth. But a recent study suggests that something many triathletes do already for purposes other than recovery may do more than any of these measures to accelerate their recovery: swim.

The study, published in the *International Journal of Sports Medicine* and conducted by researchers at the University of Western Australia, involved nine well-trained triathletes. The subjects performed an interval run consisting of 8 x 3 minutes @ 85-90 percent VO₂ peak velocity on two separate occasions. Ten hours after the run, the triathletes either swam 2,000 meters or lay down for an equal amount of time. Fourteen hours after that, the subjects performed a high-intensity run to fatigue to assess how well their running performance had recovered from the previous day's interval sessions.

Interestingly, the subjects were able to run for 13 minutes, 50 seconds after swimming for recovery compared to only 12 minutes, 8 seconds after lying still for recovery. That's a 14 percent difference. The researchers also found that swimming for recovery was associated with much lower levels of c-reactive protein, a biomarker of inflammation, 24 hours after the interval run. This finding suggested that swimming for recovery enhanced performance in a subsequent run by attenuating muscle tissue inflammation resulting from the first run.

Many triathletes routinely schedule swims as their next workout following runs because it feels good to the legs. Now we know that it not only feels good but *does* good. If you're not engaging in this practice already, start!