

Preparing For Your Event

by Brian McLaughlin

Preparing for your event will require a progressive “building” of fitness. The idea is that as you place physical demands on your body, your body will make adaptations to the demands. These adaptations are generally rolled into the terms “strength” and “fitness”. As you get stronger and more fit you can handle a more intensive training load, which you again adapt to. It is an accumulative process. Eating one cookie, most likely, will not cause any major weight gain. Eating one cookie every 10 minutes each day for 8 weeks, most likely, will have an impact. It is the accumulation of all those cookies over time that has an effect. Endurance training works best when it can seep into your system. Your body will respond to the training over time in a positive way when it is given only as much as it can handle at a time. The accumulation of this training over time will have an effect.

The following information will include basic recovery strategies as well as a training guide to lead up to the event.

Recovery

Recovery is the single most under appreciated aspect to training. You do not get more fit or stronger while you train. A very important aspect of this process is that you need to adapt to the present level of training before moving on to the next level. The body adapts while it is *not* training. This is referred to as recovery. You cannot recover while you are placing stress on the body. Adaptation is the result of stressing the body and allowing it to recover from that stress. If you do not recover, you will not fully gain the benefits of the training. Most people understand this when it comes to lifting weights. You would not work the same muscle group hard every day expecting to get stronger. You need days to rest, or recover.

You get stronger and more fit as a result of training. There are things you can do to help in the recovery process.

Muscle Care

There are some basic things you can do to help the muscular system recover.

Daily stretching will help in many ways. Many books have been written and many classes are held on the best way to stretch. If you have a favorite class or book, by all means, use those resources.

The basics of stretching are:

1. Be gentle. Just as you will not become super fit in one week, you will not become super flexible in one week. Go slow and easy. Do not judge your level of flexibility against anyone else. Stretching is not a competition.
2. Do not bounce. Once you are in position hold the stretch from 30 seconds to one minute with out bouncing.
3. Make sure you are breathing. As you are stretching continue to breath in a slow relaxed manner.
4. There should not be any pain or burning associated with stretching.
5. You will not have the same degree of flexibility all the time. There will be times when you are less flexible. This has to do with the stress and adaptations that your muscles are going through. This is normal, don't push it.

Massage is a great way to help your muscles recover. A good massage person can help you recover faster. There is a reason why every professional team has massage people on staff.

Sleep

A solid eight to nine hours of sleep every night is ideal. If you can take a nap during the day, even better. Of course, there are many things that can interrupt this amount of sleep. Sleep is important to the recovery process. Try to do your best to get the sleep you need.

Food/Nutrition

The most basic way to think of food, is to think of it as fuel and building blocks. The general categories you are going to get your fuel from are: protein and carbohydrates, including fruits and vegetables. Different foods are required for different aspects of the training. Food for recovery plays a different role than food during the training itself.

Food for recovery

There are athletes (and non-athletes) that measure out every gram of food they eat. The simplest and most effective way to get the proper nutrition needed to support the recovery process is to eat several small meals every day. “Several meals” means 4-6 per day. A small meal may consist of half a turkey sandwich, and an apple; two eggs, half a bagel, and fruit; chicken, rice, and mixed vegetables. As you can see, each example contains protein and carbohydrates including fruits and/or vegetables.

The meals will supply the body with the tools it needs to rebuild the various systems of the body that have broken down as a result of the training. The demands placed on the body through training will “breakdown” certain systems. Supplying the body with the proper nutrition is a major step in the recovery process.

Food during training

Most people know they should take in fluid while they are training. But many do not think about taking in food while they train. The rule of thumb is - if you are going to training for longer than 1 hour, take something to eat with you.

On the bike nutrition should consist of easy ways to digest food. You can buy any number of different energy bars, drinks, and gels. Most of these work fine. When judging one against another, keep in mind that if you do not like the taste you will be less likely to eat or drink it. If you do not eat or drink it, then it is not going to help you.

You want to get at least one bottle of fluid and something to eat every hour during a ride. There is an old term “bonk”. This term refers to an athlete “hitting the wall” or “running out of gas”, they have reached the end of usefulness for that training day, or event. What the term is referring to is running out of fuel (gas). You do not want to bonk. This is not good. It is much more difficult for your body to recover from a ride in which you bonk. And remember, recovery is key.

To avoid bonking, make sure you are eating throughout the ride. Do not wait until the end of the ride. If you are starting to feel hungry, you are already in trouble. Eat before you are hungry. Drink before you are thirsty.

The Training

As was mentioned earlier, the training schedule is designed to increase strength and fitness in a progressive manner with recovery built into the program. As with any training program, the closer it is followed the better it works. Training programs are written to the ideal situation. A coach can prepare an individualized program that fits into your current life. The following program is designed as a general cycling program for an adult who has a full time job and other obligations.

Notice there are 8 weeks of training listed. The event may be 18 weeks away or it may be next week. If the event is next week and you have not ridden for years there is not much you can do. However, riding during the week that you have will help get you used to the bike and the rules of the road again. Take advantage of it. As for your level of fitness, you are going to just do your best. If the event is more than 8 weeks away then you can repeat the last 4 weeks of the program as many times as possible before the event, or if you completed the beginner plan, move onto the intermediate plan. Whichever plan you use, try not to do a Week 2 or 4 during the week before the event. You want to go into the event more rested than tired. This may mean you shuffle a week to set that up.

Choosing a program

You will see two training programs listed below. One program is for less-experienced and/or limited time riders. The second program is for experienced riders with more time. Which one should you pick? Be realistic.

Always see your doctor before starting any new training program.

Answer these questions:

How much time have you spent riding in the last 6 months?

Anything less than cycling 9 hours every week, use Program 1. If you run regularly, or train in another sport, still start on Program 1. Your body needs to adapt to the demands of cycling.

How much time does your life allow you to spend riding?

Anything less than 9 hours per week, use Program 1.

What if I have plenty of time but have not been riding much?

Pick Program 1. You must build (accumulate) your fitness slowly. Having a lot of time to train does not mean you should train for longer periods of time.

What if I do not have 9 hours per week to train?

Use Program 1 but subtract time off the days you cannot train BUT DO NOT add that time back in other places. Do what you can.

What if I have not been riding at all in the last year?

Modify Program 1 by cutting everything in half. Do what you can but be very careful not to add more than 10% onto any previous day or week. Many injuries happen when people try to do too much too soon. It would be better to do too little rather than too much.

Training Schedule 1

-For less-experienced and/or limited time riders-

Listed below is time in hours

Day	Effort	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Sunday	C*	1.5	2	2	2	2	2.5	2.5	3
Monday		Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off
Tuesday	M*	1.5	1.5	1.25	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Wednesday	C*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Thursday	M*	1.5	1.5	1	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Friday		Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off
Saturday	C*	2	2	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.75	2.5	3.25
Week s Total Hours		7.5	8	7.75	9.5	8.5	9.25	9	10.25

*C = Comfortable pace *M = Moderate pace -These are defined on the following page.

Training Schedule 2

-For experienced riders with more time-

Listed below is time in hours

Day	Effort	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8
Sunday	C*	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.75	3	3	3.5
Monday		Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off
Tuesday	M*	1.5	1.5	1.25	2	2	2	1.5	2
Wednesday	C*	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.5
Thursday	M*	1.5	1.5	1	2	2	2	2	2
Friday		Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off	Off
Saturday	C*	2	2.5	2.5	3	2.75	3	3	3
Week s Total Hours		8.5	9	8.25	10.5	10.5	11	10.5	12

*C = Comfortable pace *M = Moderate pace -These are defined on the following page.

Keep in mind there is a big difference between levels of training intensity. There are many different ways to gauge intensity. The three most widely used are: heart rate monitors; power meters; and PE (perceived exertion). When you work with a coach, you can have a training plan that is tailored to your physiology. For this plan we are going to have three levels of intensity – comfortable – moderate – hard. In order for these levels to work you must be honest with yourself and where you are now. Do not try to convince yourself that the intensity you are working at is not hard because you do not want it to be hard or medium. Be honest and you will get the most out of the training.

Comfortable (C) = I can breath just fine. I could breath only through my nose. I could whistle a little song. I could have a conversation without needing to stop to take a deep breath. I could keep this pace for a long time.

Moderate (M) = I can breath fine but through my mouth only. If I whistled, it would only be a few notes. I can have a conversation, but I need to keep taking deep breaths every few words. I could keep this pace for 15 minutes or so.

Hard (H) = Breathing is labored. If I am whistling, it is not on purpose. I could say one or two words at a time. I could not keep this pace for long.

You may notice a few things about the training plan.

1. Every 3rd week there is less training time for the week. These are a rest weeks. Just as you do not want to train hard every day, you also do not want to train hard every week.
2. You will see that it is a progressive plan.
3. There are two rest days per week. This has two effects. The first is that it gives your body a chance to recover from the training. The second is that it gives you a chance to catch up on the other things you must do in life.
4. There are not any hard days. Doing hard training days can ruin a good training plan when not done correctly. Not doing any hard training days will not ruin a person's progression in getting more fit and strong. Endurance training is an accumulative progression. Be patient, you will get faster over time. The plan will work if you work the plan. In many cases riders that train hard for many weeks will see gains only after they stop going hard as often.
5. Training by time (hours) allows for the training to be progressive and therefore accumulative. If you were to go train for 20 miles it may take you one hour or it may take four hours. Riding 20 miles in very hilly areas, flat areas, windy days, or calm weather days can all vary the time you are training. If it were listed that you were to do 20 miles and you live where it is very hilly and you can only average 10 mph it is going to take you 2 hours. Whereas someone that lives where it is flat and may be able to average 18 mph, it is only going to take them a little over an hour. But if these same two people go train for 1.5 hours at a moderate level of intensity, then they will both have applied a similar level of stress to their system.

Remember - the hours listed refer to time you are on the bike riding. Stopping at a store for a drink for 15 minutes does not count towards your ride time.

6. The difference between Program 1 and Program 2 is the total amount of time spent training.

Please remember that these plans are written to the ideal. The ideal would be: you would not have to worry about how you are going to fit the training into your already busy life; the weather was perfect everyday; you never feel sick; you never have injures, etc.

Here are some FAQs for when life is not following your training plan.

I see that the longest single amount of ride time is less than the expected ride time for a day of the event. Is that right?

Yes, that is correct. Your days on the bike during the event will be longer than your training days. This is a difficult one to explain in this document. The analogy would be that runners do not run a marathon every week as they prepare for a marathon. They do a training program that leads them up to their event. While they know the event will be taxing, their preparation gets them to the start fit and strong.

Should I train when I am sick?

The standard answer is...it depends. It depends on how sick you are feeling and what kind of illness you are dealing with. The old adage is – if it is above the neck then give training a try, if it is below the neck then lay low. So if you have a head cold, give training a try, but if after 20 minutes you feel lousy, go home and rest. If you have a chest cold, stay home. Any flu symptoms, stay home.

Should I train when I am injured?

If you are injured go see a health care provider that has experience with athletes. Let them know what you are doing for training and follow their advice.

Should I ride in bad weather?

The thing to keep in mind when riding in bad weather is not whether you can do it, but is it safe? There are plenty of riders that are fully capable of riding in a windy snowstorm. The problem is that traffic may not be able to see you or be able to provide you with the necessary amount of road. Most everyone knows what it is like to drive in bad weather. Now think about what it is like to encounter something on the road during that drive. The decision should be based not only on what you can handle, but whether it is a good idea to go into traffic in that weather situation.

Can I substitute another activity for the ride?

The best way to train for a cycling event is to ride your bike. If it is just not possible to ride, then it is better to do some type of activity than nothing at all. Your heart and lungs do not know the difference between riding a bike or playing basketball, but your muscular/skeletal system certainly does.

Should I train with other people?

Training with other people is certainly a good idea, but...maybe not always. Having a person, or a group of people, to train with can help keep you motivated or simply keep you company as you train. This works the best if the other person is of a similar ability. If they are a stronger rider, then you may be put in a position to be training too hard all the time just to keep up. If you are the stronger rider, then you may be held back and you are making the other person train too hard. If the person you want to train with is of a different ability, only train a couple of times a week together. Arrange it so that it is an easy day for the stronger rider and a harder day for the less strong rider.

You should spend some time riding with other people because you will be riding with other people during your event. This means you will need to be comfortable riding with other cyclists as well as knowing the proper verbal and hand signals that are part of riding with a group. If you are not familiar with the proper verbal and hand signals, try to find a local group of riders to join and learn these rules of the road.

Do I need to ride up hills and if so how do I do that and still be training “moderately?”

Yes, you need to ride up hills as part of your training. The event that you will be taking part of has hills, therefore you need to have experience riding hills. When you are going up a hill it is more taxing to your system than riding on a flat section. Use your gears on the bike wisely to try to keep from working too hard on the way up. You will reach a point when you no longer have an easier gear to keep the intensity of the effort on the lighter side. At this point, ride as you need to to make it to the top. After reaching the top allow yourself to settle back into a moderate pace. This may take a few minutes. As you become more fit, the time it takes for your breathing to slow down will be noticeably shorter.

What if there are not any hills where I live?

The best you can try to do is to ride into the wind. Doing this adds resistance to your forward momentum, which is what going up hill does. If it is not windy either, you are going to have to just do your best when you do encounter a hill on the event. Take your time and enjoy the sites while you go up the hill.

What if I only ride 2 days one week, does that count as one of the training weeks?

No, you need to complete at least 3 of the training days in any given week for it to count as part of the training schedule. For example: If you are on week 4 but only complete 2 of the days from that week, you should repeat week 4. In this example, you would not move onto week 5. The training is progressive and accumulative. Do not move ahead too quickly.

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Brian McLaughlin is an USA Cycling Coach and the Tour Director for Maine Wheels Bicycle Club's Moose Tour and Coastal Tour. While he works with professional cyclists, he understands what it takes to be part of multi-day cycling events and is able to demystify training for riders of any level. He can be reached at info@mainewheels.org