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Overtraining 101: Your Complete Guide

When it comes to athletes in training, there is such a thing as too much of a good thing. Being competitive as an athlete – always thirsty for more – is often seen to be a good thing.

Being the first one to show up to training early in the morning and the last one to leave is often thought to be the characteristics of a champion. But, in some cases, it can do you more harm than good.

While working hard is great, pushing yourself too far past your limits is extremely problematic. A condition called overtraining can set in, which will quickly take you out of the game entirely.

If you are unaware of what overtraining is or how to get past it, it’s time that you learned. The last thing you want to do is learn the hard way by going through overtraining yourself.

Let’s begin by talking about what overtraining is and then talk about how to avoid overtraining in the first place.
What Is Overtraining?

**Overtraining** is, simply put, a state where you are putting more stress on the body on a day to day basis than it’s able to recover from.

- As stated in the Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise journal.

One major mistake that many people come to believe about overtraining is that it’s all about the physical. They think that it’s only what you are doing physically that will influence whether or not you move into an overtrained state and as such, often end up in trouble because of it.

Realize that stress is stress. Whether this comes in the form of financial stress wearing you down, work stress from a project you’re working on, or simply stress due to a lack of time in your schedule, all of this stress will add up and take a toll.

Often, you can have an athlete that’s doing fine with his or her given training schedule - they’re tired, but recovering okay to keep going. And then one day, they experience a high degree of stress. Perhaps they break up with their significant other or suffer job loss.

Their stress levels soar because of this and now, that training routine is far too much for them to handle. They aren’t recovering but yet keep pushing, only to find themselves highly fatigued, burnt out, and not feeling like carrying on.

The worst part of this all is very often, those who are most likely to over train are those individuals who are type A to start with. They want to be the best, no matter what it takes, and are on a mission to help achieve it.

So when they start to feel fatigue due to this high degree of stress in their life, what do they do?

*They push harder.*
This simply digs them deeper into the hole overall, which only amplifies the entire problem further.

The harder they push, the further into the overtraining whole they dig and the longer it’s going to take for them to get out. So rather than simply resting up when they feel tired like they should, they get themselves into serious trouble.

Now, this isn’t to say that overtraining only happens when a life stressor comes on. It can happen thanks to the training protocol you’re using as well. If, for instance, you are continually adding more work to your program or start increasing new levels of intensity and don’t adjust your rest and recovery time to compensate, that too can lead to overtraining.

Overtraining isn’t something that just comes on overnight either. It isn’t a situation here you go from being fine to doing too much and you’re out like an injury would have you. Rather, overtraining builds slowly. Day by day, you are digging that whole until one day, you just don’t climb out. Of course it can happen much more quickly if your stress load is high, but it’s not a black and white situation where you are fine and then you are overtrained.
It’ll happen on a continuum.

So now that you know what overtraining is, let’s talk symptoms. Recognizing the symptoms is the first step to making sure it doesn’t progress past its very initial stages.

The earlier you can catch overtraining and do something about it, the faster you can get past it and continue training normally again as you want to.
Signs Of Overtraining

While you may think that because overtraining is a physical issue, the signs of true overtraining will all be physical in nature. And while this is partly true, it isn't 100% the case. In many cases, there are many psychological signs that start to occur according to a study published in the Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise journal and sometimes, these are noticed even before the physical signs start to manifest themselves.

Let's look at both types of signs that you may experience when you are on the verge of becoming overtrained.

**Physical Signs Of Overtraining**

The first type of warning sign of overtraining to know is the physical signs. You may not experience all of these, but even if two or three are present, it should be enough to make you sit up and take caution.

Push harder and you may start to notice more coming into play.

- Increased resting morning heart rate
- Feeling of chronic fatigue throughout the day regardless of whether or not you exercise
- Feeling listless and like you have no strength
- Increased water retention (you look puffier than normal)
- Slow recovery between workout sessions – what took a day for you to bounce back from now takes two or three
- Decreased physical performance when training – while you used to hit PR’s, now you struggle to just maintain the status quo
- You have constant aches in your joints, bones, and muscles that don’t seem to go away
- You are catching colds or other illnesses more often now indicating a weakened immune system
• You find that you feel terrible in the hours or days after a big workout has been completed

It can sometimes be hard to distinguish between basic level fatigue that’s normal after a hard workout and a higher level of fatigue that is indicative of something more. Usually when it’s an overtraining type of fatigue, you’ll notice that you feel the fatigue throughout your entire body, not just in the muscle groups you train and the fatigue makes you feel incredibly heavy and like you have no muscular strength at all.

Another key difference is the recovery of the fatigue. Normal hard workout fatigue will ease up as the day progresses on while overtraining fatigue tends to stick around into the next day or longer.

Now let’s look at some of the psychological signs that you could be overtraining. If you start to notice these happening, whether in presence or absence of the above symptoms, it’s time to sit up and take action to remedy the situation.
Psychological Signs Of Overtraining

- Lack of desire to train as you normally do – it often feels like it takes everything you’ve got just to do a workout when normally you’re antsy to get started
- You are losing interest in activities you formerly enjoyed – you hardly ever want to go out with your friends any more, you’d rather just stay home and relax
- You lose our libido
- You are irritable and/or grumpy most of the time
- You are having trouble sleeping at night – despite your high level of fatigue, sleep quality and duration can actually decline

Everyone will present signs and symptoms of overtraining differently, so there’s no one yardstick used to measure it. Generally speaking, if you feel like something is ‘off’, then it likely is and you should be taking steps to remedy the situation, which would include taking time off from training entirely to rest up and then figuring out what caused the overtraining in the first place (whether it was a stressful life event or a problem with your overall training schedule) and making sure that issue is resolved going forward so that you do not continue to experience overtraining any longer.

Now let’s move forward and talk about some of the important points to note about avoiding overtraining in the first place. If you can simply side-step it, this will be your best bet to seeing optimal success.
The 10 Best Ways To Avoid Overtraining

Below you will find ten steps to take to minimize overtraining. By putting these in order, you are putting your best foot forward to keep up your intense workout schedule without a problem.

1. Schedule Regular Rest Days

Perhaps the single most important thing that you must do if you want to avoid overtraining is making sure to schedule at least one rest day each week, according to a study published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. Most people will need two, possibly even three.

Do this without fail each and every week. If you go more than 7 days in a row with heavy training, you are in for disaster.

Likewise, it’s also a good idea to vary the intensity of your workouts from day to day. Every single day shouldn’t be an intense day but rather, you should be focusing on bringing in some lighter days into your program plan.

2. Schedule Full Weeks Off

In addition to having those rest days in there, you should also be allowing for full weeks off every so often. Once every 6-8 weeks for instance, take a week off to allow for complete rest and recovery.

Many athletes don’t do this because they are too scared of losing all their training progress. The real truth however is that very often after a rest week, you’ll come back stronger than you were before.
If you absolutely cannot take a full week off to rest, use a deloading week where you back off on the training intensity and volume.

3. Commit To 8 Plus Hours Of Sleep Each Night

Sleep is going to be absolutely essential to your recovery, so it’s a must. If you are only sleeping six to seven hours a night, you’ve found your problem.

Commit to getting at least eight hours of sleep each night, if not more. The more sleep you can get, the faster you will bounce back from your workout the day before.

Make sure that you are aiming to get high quality sleep as well, which means going to bed prior to midnight (as the earlier hours tend to be more restorative) and creating a distraction free sleep environment (no lights, noises, or electronics).

For many athletes, getting enough sleep can make all the difference in both whether they are at risk for overtraining as well as the overall performance they give.

4. Tend To Post Workout Nutrition

You’ll also want to be looking at your post-workout nutrition as well. Are you giving your body the nutrients it needs? If not, that’s going to hinder your overall recovery capacity.

Post workout, you want to take in both carbohydrates and proteins, which will provide the raw materials for tissue regeneration and energy replenishment.
If you are waiting hours after your training to get this meal in, that’s only going to slow recovery, which may hinder you from being able to do your scheduled workout the next day.

5. Watch Your Carbohydrate Intake

Speaking of nutrition, you’ll also want to watch your carbohydrate intake. If you aren’t getting enough carbohydrates, you’ll be exercising with depleted muscle glycogen stores, which can also fast-track you to the state of overtraining.

While at times you may need to decrease body weight and as such, lowering carbohydrates will be important, never decrease them too low and never stay very low carb for an extended period of time.

If you are going to decrease your carbohydrate intake, make sure that you have period high carb days scattered into your plan where you bring your intake up again.

If you are going to decrease your carbohydrate intake, make sure that you have period high carb days scattered into your plan where you bring your intake up again.

This will help replenish muscle glycogen levels, giving you fuel to train with.

6. Keep Everyday Stressors Low

The next important step is to keep everyday stressors low. As we mentioned earlier, any form of stress can put you into a state of overtraining, so it’s not just the physical stressors you need to be concerned over.

Constantly monitor your day-to-day life and if you notice that you are starting to feel stressed out, do what you can to lower those levels. The greater stress reduction you experience, the less chances of overtraining you’ll have.

And, think of it this way – the less stress you have in your day to day life, the harder you
can push when you do your workouts. You’ll have that much more in you to work hard without risking overtraining.

7. Use Good Recovery Strategies

The next important thing to note is that you should be using proper recovery strategies as well. This means focusing on using foam rolling often to ease any muscle tension, stretching regularly after intense workouts, considering some recovery cardio training to get the blood pumping throughout the body, and taking ice cold or hot baths to help speed recovery as well.

If your budget allows, you might also consider investing in a few good deep tissue massages a month to really help speed the healing process.

8. Periodize Your Program

It’s also a smart move to start periodizing your program as well. This means that during certain times of the year, you might be focusing primarily on building strength. During other times, you might be focusing more on speed. Finally, you may also have an agility and balance section built into your overall program plan.

By switching between these areas of focus ensures that you are changing the nature of the stressor being placed on the body, which will then decrease your overall risk of overtraining, according to a study published in the Strength & Conditioning Journal.

If you aren’t hammering your body in the same way for months and months on end, you are giving it time to recover from one stressor as you focus on the other.

9. Cross Train

Which brings us to the next tip to know if you want to prevent overtraining, which is to cross train regularly. Adding in days of training where you are doing exercises that are far different from your usual style of training can help you sustain optimal fitness while
giving certain muscle groups a break and preventing overtraining, according to a study published in the Medicine and Science in Sports And Exercise.

Cross training is great to do once or twice a week as an alternative to taking a complete rest day.

In addition to that, cross training like this will also help you ensure that you are preventing the occurrence of overuse injuries as well.

10. Learn To Listen To Your Body

Finally, the last thing to note is that you’ll want to be sure that you are listening to your body. If you start to feel like something is off, then you’ll want to back off. Take a day or two off.

Remember, it’s far better to take a day off from training if you feel like you may be on the verge of overtraining than it is to keep pushing and wind up having to take two weeks off because you simply pushed too far.

Always listen to your body and pay attention to what it’s telling you. Far too many athletes are in the habit of neglecting the signs their body sends them and instead, pushing onward.

Avoid this and you can be sure that you are decreasing your risk factor for overtraining.
Conclusion

So there you have your guide to overtraining. Prevention is the best method here as the only way to recover from overtraining is rest.

Ironically, the reason you become overtrained in the first place is due to lack of rest, so look at it this way. Either rest now, wisely, or you will be forced to rest for an extended period of time later.

Either way you look at it, you will be resting as part of your workout program.

Be wise about it and it’ll be far less painful.

References:


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Meet Funk Roberts

Funk Roberts, President and Owner of Funk Roberts Fitness, is a former Professional Beach Volleyball player turned Fitness trainer. Funk is an online fat loss expert that helps thousands of people worldwide burn unwanted fat while building lean muscle through his website, videos, articles, media and fitness products.

Funk is a Certified Metabolic Training Expert, Kettlebell Specialist, Mixed Martial Arts Conditioning Coach, Celebrity Fat Loss Expert and Personal Trainer. He was just named one of America’s Premiere Experts and will be seen on ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox TV Affiliates in the summer of 2013.

Funk has been a featured trainer in a few fitness training DVD’s and has produced his own online products such as, Elite Strength and Conditioning for Combat Athletes, Funk’s 6 Week Jump Training Program and the newly launched Spartan Training System 10 Week Fat Loss Program.

Funk is passionate about helping people transform their body and educate them on how to lead a healthy lifestyle. His mission is to help 500,000 people by 2014 change their life’s using fitness, nutrition and motivation.

His over 30 years of training, expertise, research and experience has made the difference in helping others change their lives for the better.

Funk has a following of over 40,000 subscribers to his websites, along with 36,000 YouTube subscribers and over 40,000 fans on Facebook and communicates with them on a daily to weekly basis.

He continues to learn and improve his skills so that he can supply the best information and contribute to the fitness community and help people make a difference in their lives.

At a young 44 years old, Funk is married and has 2 older children. His passion is training men, women, teens and athletes, helping people transform their lives, travelling and spending time with his wife and family.
SOCIAL MEDIA

Funk Roberts Fitness Blog : [http://www.funkrobertsfitness.com](http://www.funkrobertsfitness.com)
MMA Strength & Conditioning Workouts : [http://www.funkmma.com](http://www.funkmma.com)
YouTube : [http://www.youtube.com/user/marcroops?feature=mhee](http://www.youtube.com/user/marcroops?feature=mhee)
Facebook : [https://www.facebook.com/funkrobertsfitness](https://www.facebook.com/funkrobertsfitness)
Twitter : [@FunkMMA](https://twitter.com/@FunkMMA)

OTHER PROGRAMS

Funk Roberts Spartan Training System 10 Week Program: [http://www.10weekfatloss.com](http://www.10weekfatloss.com)

Funk Flex Elite Strength and Conditioning for Combat Athletes: [http://www.funkflexmmaworkouts.com](http://www.funkflexmmaworkouts.com)

50 Shades of Burpees: [http://www.fiftyshadesofburpees.com](http://www.fiftyshadesofburpees.com)

Kettlebell For Fighters 6 Week Program: [http://kettlebellforfighters.com](http://kettlebellforfighters.com)

Gauntlet Workouts: http://spartaworkouts.com/GauntletWorkouts.html

Funk Flex Heavy Bag Conditioning Program: http://www.funkflexheavybag.com

Funk 6-Week Jump Training Program: http://www.funkjumptraining.com

Beastmode Bodyweight 4-Week Program: http://spartaworkouts.com/bodyweightforfighters.html