

Off Season Rest and Recovery

By Susan Ellis

Your body has taken a lickin' and kept on tickin' for many months now during a busy season. What it craves now is rest and recovery, whether you want to admit it or not.



During the season you train hard to build up your endurance and strength and put yourself through a lot of mental stress, especially those of you who are trying out for important teams. All of these things can take a toll on your body and now is the time to give your body and your mind a break to recover both physically and mentally so you are fresh and ready for a new season of training.

How long should your recovery be? It depends somewhat on the level you are competing and training at. For most high level athletes (National team level) this period needs to be at least a month long. For athletes competing at a national, state, or provincial level it might be 2 months. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't be doing anything though. A couple of weeks of nothing is a good thing because you absolutely need a mental break from even thinking about skating, but after that there are some things that you can start doing too.

Once you've had a mental break it's good to go back and evaluate your season, identifying things that worked well, and things that didn't. From this evaluation and identification process you can start to formulate your plan for next season, targeting areas of improvement and identifying ways to improve them.

You can also start some very general non-skating specific activity such as easy runs, bike rides, flexibility, or use another sport or cross training to stay in shape. Many teenage athletes finish a skating season and jump right in to high school cross country, soccer, or another sport that is just as intense as skating. Although high school sports are very important to overall growth as a person, you may need to consider then taking a break after the high school sport is finished and not just continuing on with your skating training. Your body (and mind) can only take so much (ya, I know, y'all think you're invincible!)

You also need your post season break to take care of any nagging injuries such as tendonitis, muscles soreness, muscle imbalances, stress fractures. Get in touch with a good athletic trainer or physiotherapist to help you deal with these. Some people think these will heal on their own, only to have them flare up once training starts again. Speed skaters in particular are prone to back problems, tight hip flexors, tight IT bands, hamstrings, etc, simply because of the position we train in, so get ahead of these problems before you start back.

Off season recovery period is also a good time to review your videos, either of yourself to help in identifying what you need to do, or of other skaters to see how they do what you need.

Catching up on your sleep is also very important to maintaining overall health and to allowing your body to completely rest. Some athletes use the off season as party time, then start training again while the body is still exhausted. While catching up on social time is important, staying up late is not what your body needs to recover.

When you start back in to training don't just jump right in where you left off. Ease into it with general training or cross training. Early season training should be whole body training and not skating specific training. After all your body is attached to and held together by the non-skating specific muscles so those need to be ready to carry the load of the skating specific muscles. Work on your general strength and endurance before working back to skating strength and endurance.

Enjoy your off season!