

It's a little known fact that the fourth stage of exercise is to...

RECOVER AND REGENERATE

By Martin Feaver

Although most people tend to think of exercise in terms of activities such as jogging, swimming, yoga or dancing, exercise actually consists of four components. Three of these – aerobic training, strength conditioning and flexibility training – are well known but it usually surprises people when they are told the fourth is recovery!

Recovery allows the body to recuperate from the stresses of exercise before putting it under strain again. Inadequate recovery can lead to suppression of the immune system with increased likelihood of illness, reduced ability to exercise and greater risk of injury.

Most of us believe we are getting fitter as we do exercise, but that's not the case! Although some changes do occur as we exercise, the significant and long term adaptations, that make a real difference to our lives, only happen when we are recovering from our exertions.

As you exercise, your body is put under physical stress and has to work harder than it usually does in the activities of everyday life. To cope with the increased physical demands of the exercise, the body adjusts – the heart beats faster, there is increased blood flow to the muscles being used and the lungs work harder to cope with the increased demand for oxygen by the body.

These short-term adaptations to exercise are immediate and return to their normal state when the physical exertion ceases, or soon afterwards.

The most important benefits of exercise though occur with regular exercise and – over a period of time – long-term changes. Your resting heart rate is reduced, blood pressure is lowered, blood vessels develop and muscles are stronger – all of which enable your body to do more before becoming fatigued.

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And if those changes weren't enough, the immune system becomes stronger, confidence increases and your mood is more positive.

While we are actually exercising, the body cannot rebuild, it can merely cope with the strain it is under. Once you have stopped exercising, the body starts to rebuild and repair itself and unsurprisingly what's repaired or developed depends on the type of exercise that has been undertaken.

This process of recovery entails rest from exercise, adequate sleep and good

nutrition. Without all these essential elements, the body does not have the means to develop and regenerate. The amount of time your body will need to recover depends on the type and intensity of exercise you do. It would not be sensible to run a marathon every day, but daily walking is fine.

Although recovery can be complete rest, usually it is undertaking a less intense exercise session or a different type of exercise such as yoga or

stretching. For example, a brisk walk one day could be followed by a less demanding session the next day and a third day completing a stretch routine. And if you're not convinced by now of the importance of recovery, the good news is that effective recovery means we become fitter faster!

Although we need to allow our bodies the chance to recover, we still have to exercise regularly to keep our bodies healthy. Remember the saying 'a change is as good as a rest,' and you will be applying the right approach to fitness.