

For 220 Magazine

Two-a-Days

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I am often asked by athletes how they should structure a training day when doing two or more workouts. That's a good question. Most of us are busy people with lots going on in our lives so we need to get the most out of every workout.

The starting point is identifying the purpose of the training session. Why are we doing this workout? What outcome do we want to achieve? The autumn and winter periods are the ideal time to work on our limiters; those are our weakest abilities – the ones that inhibit our race performance. This could mean anything from increasing our endurance because we find it tough to finish longer races to developing strength because we struggle on hilly courses or improving our technical skills to make us more efficient. Having a clear idea of the purpose of each of our sessions then allows us to structure their order.

As a rule of thumb, if our purpose is developing a specific skill then we are better served to put these sessions at the start of the day when we are likely to be fresher. Improving swimming skills is a good example of this. Trying to develop a specific skill after a gym session or run is likely to have the opposite effect on the skill we want to improve. Fatigue inhibits both our physical and mental ability to focus on the required drill. So skill development sessions should come before any other workouts.

You can also include any form of Breakthrough (BT) work out in the same way. These are sessions that focus specifically on 'A' race limiters and because they are challenging require at least 36 hours for full recovery. If you can do these in the afternoon or early evening they may produce better results, but care needs to be taken in balancing the day's stress by placing a lighter work out before it and, possibly, after if for recovery.

Strength and other muscular conditioning sessions are important building blocks through the base and build periods and again care needs to be taken around what comes before or after a weight or plyometrics session. It's usually best to have several hours of recovery and a recovery meal after a workout of this nature. These sessions are best followed by easy to moderate bike rides or runs as this reduces the chances of overuse injuries. If you swim on a weight lifting or plyometrics day make it the first workout.

The nature of our endurance sport means that we will get fatigued through our training. This needs to be carefully managed particularly with running. Even on days when we are not doing brick or multiple training sessions, minimising running when our legs are tired will help reduce the risk of injury. Given the option, when you are leg weary go for a ride rather than a run. This will greatly

reduce your risk of injury and boost your training consistency which ultimately means greater fitness.

For an improving long-distance triathlete aiming at training around 9 to 12 hours per week, a multiple training day two to four times per week during the base period works well. One of those sessions can be a brick so long as it's not too intensive. This can then progress through the build period by increasing intensity on one of the brick elements, either the bike or the run, in alternate weeks. The key here is again managing the trade off between the training sessions. So, for example, a long, steady bike ride could be followed by a short, moderately intense tempo run, or conversely a shorter bike ride at a high pace may be followed by a long, easy run. A steady diet of bricks made up of long, intense rides followed by long, intense runs is likely to lead to a breakdown.

Recovering from training is key on multiple session days and not always easy when we are busy at work. It would be great if we could jump into an ice bath, get a massage and have our meals cooked for us, but until we reach pro status we need to do what we can to help. That includes staying off our legs as much as possible and gentle stretching at our desk or around the workplace.

Post-workout recovery food is equally, if not more important. On the days of multiple workouts, long sessions or intense training snack on carbohydrates to speed up recovery and replace lost glycogen. Bananas and dried fruit like apricots and raisins are good for this and also excellent for reducing body fluid acidity. And they are easy to eat at a desk or in the car. Keep water around for rehydration and make sure to have a meal later with carbohydrate and a good protein source. Eggs, fish, lean meat like turkey or chicken is ideal; the branched chain amino acids found in these protein sources are critical component of muscle repair.

Conclusion

Training more than once per day is an important part of any serious endurance athlete's progression and therefore carefully planning your workouts and recovery is also important. We are all looking for that elusive balance that will allow us to train, race and work while having a great family and social life. If as with most athletes that continues to be a work in progress, these principles will help you get the most from your multiple session days.

Typical Off-Season Base period for the long-distance triathlete

(9-12 hours per week)

DAY	AM	PM
Monday	Swim Technical Skills Set (45 min)	Turbo - Cycling skills drills (30-60 min)
Tuesday	Endurance Run including skills (60-90 min)	
Wednesday	Easy Bike ride (60 min) with tempo transition run (15 min)	
Thursday	Endurance Swim (60-75 min)	Strength and Conditioning (30-45 min)
Friday	Day off	
Saturday	Swim Technical Skills Set (45 min)	Breakthrough Run (60-90 min)
Sunday	Endurance Bike ride (2-3 hours)	Strength and Conditioning (30-45 min)

Jargon Buster

Limiters – A weakness that needs improvement for you to make improvement in an A-priority race performance.

Breakthrough Workout – Any work out that requires 36 hours to fully recover from. Typically focused on 'A' race limiters.

Brick session – a workout that combines multiple sports, usually bike and run.

Branched Chain Amino Acids (BCAA) – Essential amino acids that inhibit muscle protein breakdown and aid in muscle glycogen storage. The BCAAs are valine, leucine, and isoleucine.