

Physical Health in the Off Season

How do you know if this article is for you? While there is useful information here for everyone, it especially applies to you if you find yourself struggling to take off those last few pounds every spring, or if your first trip's aches and pains make you wish you'd gotten in better shape for the season. The main goal for this article is to create an awareness of the importance of fitness and nutrition in preparation for a long summer on the river. As with any fitness regimen, before you even begin you must first visit your doctor or health care professional to make sure you're in fighting shape to start. So if you want to be that badass river guide, then *hell yes* this article is for you.

Fitness Training: Fitness training is based on a cycle of stress, response, and adaptation that results in improved performance, called the overload system. It is essentially the application of stress to a system over and above what is considered the "normal" baseline for that particular system. The purpose of off season training is to stress the system with the appropriate overload so adaptation occurs. If the stress is not sufficient, no adaptation occurs, and if the stress is too great, injury on the job or overtraining result. Variations of volume and intensity, with recovery periods, are what create the stress, response, adaptation cycle to improve fitness and performance levels.

Consistent Training:

Training should be consistent enough to force adaptations to the cardio-respiratory system (heart and lungs) and the muscular-skeletal system (soft tissue and bone). For example, 3 weekly sessions of aerobic conditioning for 20-60 minutes at between 60 - 90% of maximum heart rate, plus 2-3 weekly strength training will be consistent enough to provide gains in aerobic stamina and strength, respectively.

Nutrition

Establishing and maintaining the healthful diet is crucial to your overall success on any fitness program or physical work you chose, which of course includes river guiding. The right foods will regulate your blood sugar, balance your hormones, and maximize your energy, all of which promote optimal fat burning and muscle development. In short, eat clean—you know, eat food which grows in the ground or has a mother. Food should not come from bags, boxes or aluminum cans ☺ just try and eat clean.

The proper balance of three basic macronutrients – carbohydrates, proteins and fats – is often debated. The truth is that the correct mix depends on you and your individual biochemical needs. Apart from eating the right amount of food and calories, you also need to eat enough times during the day to create a thermodynamic state for the body to burn fat and build muscle. How often do you need to eat? 4-6 times a day is the rule. When you eat this many times a day the body will burn fat as you get fit. Our society wants us to believe that a low calorie diet is your path to weight loss and management. Those 1000 -1200 calorie diets backfire because the body goes into starvation mode, which creates fat for energy. In short "eat more to burn more." When I worked as a ski coach I would say to all my athletes "a proper diet can't make an average athlete elite, but a poor diet can make an elite athlete average."

Ideal Proteins

Salmon, chicken, lean cuts of grass fed beef, buffalo, turkey, Tuna, Egg Whites, low fat cottage cheese, low fat cheeses, and low fat yogurt, soy products (milk, tofu, soy burgers, edamame), nuts (unsalted).

Ideal Complex Carbohydrates

Sweet potato/yam/potato, peas/corn, oatmeal (avoid instant), brown rice, wild rice, whole wheat bread and tortillas, whole wheat pasta, and beans.

Ideal Fibrous Carbohydrates

Veggies and fruits: goal is 7-10 servings a day.

Broccoli, peppers (red, green, yellow) greens (chard, spinach, romaine) cucumbers, sprouts, bananas, berries, peaches, apples, mango, melons and grapefruit.

Ideal Fats

Olive oil, avocado, flax seed, Omega-3 EFA fish oil/krill oil, and nuts.

Eat every 3-4 hours – no matter what! If you're serious about attaining or maintaining energy levels while in season or off season then etch these words into your brain: never get hungry! Waiting too long or skipping meals will only sabotage your ability to work effectively.

Hydration

Drink water. Over 70% of your bodily functions take place in water—a lack of water causes all your systems to slow down—especially in the hot/dry environment river guides work in. If you're thirsty it's too late; you've already begun the dehydration process. Consume at least 8-12 eight ounce glasses of water throughout the day or try this formula: divide your body weight by 2 and drink that many ounces daily. Example: $\frac{1}{2}$ of 150lbs = 75 oz. per day.

Note: *The heat of the day and your work load will determine either more or less in water consumption.* Water is the most important nutrient in the human body and has many benefits. One is that it increases the amount of oxygen in the bloodstream which in turn increases your body's ability to metabolize food and thus increases performance.

You already eat and drink water every day, so it's not all that difficult to add a little structure to the routine, especially when the results are noticeable!

Work the river to get fit or get fit to work on the river?

Don't just run rivers or play to get in shape, get in shape to run rivers and play. Today guides have to be in great shape to be injury free in order to stay on the job on a consistent basis. Successful guides require physical ability, technical skill and mental toughness. A well designed fitness program to ensure optimal performance and to stay injury free is both an art and a science. To ensure proper training, fitness progressions, and optimize your performance, it is important to look at all the factors that affect your fitness and on the job performance. These include: your chronological age (a well designed program for growth and development), your body type, your pre-existing general and specific fitness levels, your general health status, and the rehabilitation status of any of your past or current injuries.

Structured Physical Assessments

By utilizing the expertise and experience of Sports Medicine and Science Personnel you ensure a well-rounded fitness program and optimize your job performance.

- Get prompt help for any and all injuries and illnesses.
- Participate in comprehensive medical screening including ligament laxity test, blood work and urinalysis—these can prevent and identify injuries
- Screening is best done at least two times a year, October and April, prior to the start of your preparation and the start of the boating season.
- A physical assessment by someone who knows what to look for may save you a lot of pain and frustration later in the season.
- Have your Doctor or Physiotherapist screen you for potential problem areas.

In conclusion, fitness is the fountain of youth. It is a way to redeem yourself from a life of bad food and drink choices and it makes you look and feel good. A well designed fitness program helps prevent and reverse many physiological and mental diseases and helps prevent injuries. So be a badass and get in shape for your next season on the river!

“Speaking generally, all parts of the body which have function, if used in moderation and exercise in labors to which each is accustomed, become healthy and well developed and age slowly. But, if unused and left idle, they come liable to disease, defective in growth and age quickly.”

Hippocrates 370BC

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