

The background of the image is a soft-focus photograph of a bedroom. On the left, a bed with white linens is visible. In the center, a potted plant with dark leaves sits on a surface. To the right, a window is covered with light-colored, sheer curtains, allowing natural light to filter through. The overall atmosphere is calm and serene.

HHH

Guides

Understanding Recovery

Sleep, Stress and Rest Days

A guide to help you train smarter, recover better, and feel your strongest.



Most people think progress comes from pushing harder. But the truth is, your body doesn't grow, adapt, or change when you train—it does all of that when you recover.

If you've ever felt sore all the time, stuck in a plateau, or just constantly tired, there's a good chance your recovery needs more attention. This guide is here to help you understand what's really going on when you rest—and why sleep, stress management, and proper rest days are some of the most powerful tools in your training toolkit.

Whether you're here to lose fat, build strength, or simply feel more in control of your health, getting recovery right will help everything else fall into place.

Let's dive in.

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SLEEP, STRESS & CORTISOL

What do they do?

You've probably heard that sleep and stress are important—but what do they actually do to your results?

Let's start with stress.

Cortisol: Not All Bad, But Needs Managing

Cortisol is a hormone released by your adrenal glands. It's your body's built-in alarm system—it helps you wake up in the morning, stay alert, and respond to danger or challenges.

In short bursts, cortisol is helpful. But when it stays high for too long (because of poor sleep, anxiety, overtraining, or life stress), it starts to get in the way of progress.

- High cortisol over time can lead to:
- Increased fat storage, especially around your stomach
- Poor recovery and higher injury risk
- Trouble sleeping (especially staying asleep)
- Mood swings, brain fog, and low motivation

Sapolsky, R. M., et al. (2000). How do glucocorticoids influence stress responses? Endocrine Reviews, 21(1), 55–89.

What About Sleep?

Sleep is one of the most powerful (and free) tools we have to recover from training.

When you sleep, your body:

Repairs muscles damaged during exercise

Releases growth hormone and other recovery hormones

Balances appetite hormones (ghrelin and leptin)

Supports your immune system, mood, and energy levels



SLEEP, STRESS & CORTISOL

What do they do?

When you don't sleep enough—especially if it's less than 6 hours—your body starts to struggle. One study showed that people who slept only 5.5 hours a night lost less fat and more muscle compared to those who slept 8.5 hours, even though both groups ate the same.

Nedeltcheva, A. V., et al. (2010). Insufficient sleep undermines dietary efforts to reduce adiposity. Annals of Internal Medicine, 153(7), 435-441.



Signs You Might Need Better Sleep or Stress Management

- Waking up tired or groggy even after 7+ hours
- Cravings for sugar or high-carb snacks
- Feeling “tired but wired” at night
- Struggling to stay consistent in workouts

Simple Tips That Actually Work

- Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep most nights
- Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day
- No screens for 30–60 mins before bed (blue light messes with melatonin)
- Cut caffeine after 2pm—it stays in your system longer than you think
- Try box breathing before bed (4 seconds in, hold, 4 out, hold) to relax your nervous system

Dattilo, M., et al. (2011). Sleep and muscle recovery: Endocrinological and molecular basis. *Medical Hypotheses*, 77(2), 220–222.



WHY REST DAYS MATTER

Listen to your body

You've probably heard the phrase "listen to your body"—but that only works if you understand what it's saying. One of the biggest mistakes people make is thinking more training = better results. In reality, if you're always pushing and never recovering, you're just burning out your progress.

What Happens When You Rest

Training breaks your body down. Recovery is what builds it back up—stronger.

Here's what actually happens when you take time to rest:

- Muscle fibres repair and grow after being stressed during training
- Energy stores (like glycogen) are replenished
- Hormones like testosterone and growth hormone return to baseline
- Inflammation reduces, which supports immune function and lowers injury risk
- Your nervous system resets, helping your coordination, reaction times and strength

Damas, F., et al. (2016). The time course of muscle damage and inflammatory responses to resistance training. European Journal of Applied Physiology, 116, 1211–1223.

Even one extra rest or low-intensity day per week can dramatically improve performance and recovery.

Signs You Might Need More Rest

Sometimes, your body will tell you before your brain will admit it. Look out for:

- Soreness that lasts more than 48 hours
- Workouts feel harder than usual
- Trouble sleeping, even when tired
- Reduced strength or endurance
- Low motivation or mood swings

These are all signs you might not be undertraining—but under-recovering.

Meeusen, R., et al. (2013). Prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the overtraining syndrome. European Journal of Sport Science, 13(1), 1–24.



WHY REST DAYS MATTER

Listen to your body

Types of Rest Days

Not all rest has to mean lying on the sofa all day (although that has its place too). Think of recovery as a spectrum:



Kellmann, M. (2010). Preventing overtraining in athletes: stress/recovery monitoring. Scandinavian Journal of Medicine & Science in Sports, 20(S2), 95–102.

How Many Rest Days Do You Need?

There's no perfect number—but most people do best with: 2–3 rest or recovery days per week, depending on training intensity, sleep, and life stress

If your sessions are intense or you're in a calorie deficit, you may need even more

Recap: Rest Days Aren't Optional

They're not "earned." They're planned.

They're not a sign of slacking off. They're a sign of a smart, long-term strategy.



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You just need to be consistent

You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be consistent—and that includes being consistent with recovery.

We've covered how stress, poor sleep, and skipped rest days can all slow down your results. So let's get practical. How can you actually apply this to your weekly routine, especially when life is already busy?

The Recovery Self-Check

Use this quick checklist to decide whether you need a rest day, an active recovery day, or just a bit more sleep tonight.

Ask yourself:

Did I sleep well last night?

Am I more sore than usual?

Do I feel mentally foggy, anxious or low?

Is my performance dipping this week?

If you answer "yes" to two or more:

Don't panic.

Just shift a session, drop the intensity, or swap it for an active recovery day. This isn't you "falling off"—this is you listening in.

How to Plan Your Week

Here's a simple way to start making recovery part of the plan, not an afterthought.

Example for someone training 4x per week:

Monday – Strength

Tuesday – Cardio or light conditioning

Wednesday – Rest or active recovery

Thursday – Strength

Friday – Rest or mobility

Saturday – Strength or class

Sunday – Active recovery walk



PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

You just need to be consistent

If your week is more hectic, tie rest days to busy life days.

Got a long work shift, emotional day or disrupted sleep? Use that as your recovery trigger.

Let's not forget the basics:

Training makes the demand.

Sleep and recovery are what allow your body to adapt.

You can't "out-discipline" burnout. You'll just stall progress and feel worse for it.

In fact, most people who start to feel stuck don't need another new workout—they need better recovery.

Final Thoughts

You don't need to do everything at once. But if you've been feeling drained, sore, or off-track—it's worth asking:

1

Am I really recovering?

2

Do I treat rest as part of the process—or something I only do when I crash?

Your results aren't built in the gym.
They're built in how well you support your body between sessions.



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Want to learn more?

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That's it—the recovery basics, done properly.

It's easy to feel like you're not doing enough. But if there's one thing I want you to take from this guide, it's that rest isn't something you earn after working hard. It's part of working hard in a way that actually lasts.

Being consistent doesn't mean smashing every session. It means listening to your body, giving it what it needs, and trusting that recovery is where your results are built—not lost.

If this guide made you think, or you realised something needs adjusting in your week, I'd love to hear about it. Drop me a message, or bring it to the next group call—we'll work through it together.

You've got this.

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