



National Triathlon Training Centre
Centre National d'Entrainement
en Triathlon

"Building Excellence in Multi-Sport"

Victoria, British Columbia Canada



Resuming Your Strength Training Program

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February 15, 2004

Winter is an ideal time to vary your routine and enhance your sport specific strength. Whether you are in the weight room for the first time or returning to your regular strength training program, there are several ways to make your transition into the gym more enjoyable and effective.

Carefully planned strength training sessions can improve your endurance and assist in injury prevention. The key to building strength and successfully resuming your program is in the mixture between gym workouts and the primary disciplines of swimming, cycling and running. Combining strength training and endurance work can be like mixing water and oil, but with some patience and a balanced approach, you can reap the rewards of winter strength training.

In traditional weight training programs, triathletes often find that they get too sore after each lifting session. The pain and stiffness they experience in the weight room translates to poor training in the other 3 disciplines. Fitness gains are lessened because the athlete compromises their energy and technique from swimming, cycling and running. If they manage to make it through the initial soreness, they may have lost up to a month of proper training in their endurance foundation period. Most however, abandon strength training after the first painful training session.

You can build strength without compromising the rest of your training. Using some simple guidelines and a 4 week Transfer plan, you will minimize soreness and continue to maintain your triathlon training program.

The transition to the weight room involves 2 progressions. The first step is to introduce strength training with some Body Weight Exercises. The second step is to add a Circuit Training program before beginning your regular strength training program in the gym.

During the foundation period, the volume of aerobic training should be reduced to compensate for the added demands of strength training. Incorporating strength work, without a reduction in aerobic training volume, can be detrimental to your progress. Be patient, there will be plenty of time to increase aerobic volume later in the year.

If you begin your program gradually, you will minimize the risk of muscle soreness and injury. An overenthusiastic start to a strength program may result in delayed onset muscle soreness (and fatigue) that will compromise the quality of your foundation workouts in swimming, cycling and running for 48 - 72 hours after your weight training sessions.

Body Weight Exercises and Abdominal Work – Week 1 & 2

Begin your program with some Body Weight exercises. In these exercises, your body weight provides the resistance for improving muscular strength and endurance. After a summer of hard training and racing, you may find that even these movements can create some unexpected soreness.

You can include, push-ups, sit-ups, bench dips (triceps), pull-ups, lunges, and bench step-ups in your Body Weight routine. You can do this work at home or even at the end of an easy run in the park. These exercises can also be included throughout your strength program if you have difficulty getting to the gym for a training session.

Perform Body Weight exercises 3 times per week for 2 weeks. Start with 3 sets of 12 repetitions for each exercise. If some of the Body Weight exercises are too difficult, complete similar movements with the help of light free weights. You can also modify your body position, such as bending knees in a push up, to lessen the load on each exercise.

It is important to include abdominal work during your reintroduction to strength training and throughout the majority of your Foundation training. Without strong abdominal muscles, back muscles and obliques you will never reach your full athletic potential.

Sample abdominal and back strengthening exercises can include:

- 1) **Stomach crunches**
- 2) **Back Extensions:** Lie flat on the ground, face down with fingers touching your ears, raise your upper body off the ground using the muscles in your lower back. Go as high as you can. Stay in control throughout this movement. Slowly lower yourself to the start position and repeat.
- 3) **Front bridge:** Similar to a push-up position, but with forearms resting on the ground. This is a static exercise where you will hold the position with abs tight. Keep your back straight without “sagging” with your lower back.
- 4) **Side bridges:** Same as a front bridge, but on your side, leaning on one forearm. Side position is held without “sagging in the middle”. Top leg rests on bottom leg. Raise the upper arm into the air to add difficulty.
- 5) **Leg Raises:** Lay on your back. Raise heels slightly off the ground. Press your lower back “into the floor”. Lift legs from start position to 45 degrees in the air and then return to start position. Repeat.
- 6) **Ball exercises** – all of the exercises above can be done with a gym ball (also known as a Swiss Ball or Fit Ball). The added instability of the ball, forces you to balance and stabilize while moving through the exercises.

Include the abdominal work and back strengthening work as part of your normal Body Weight exercise routine. For most exercises, begin with 1 set of 12-15 repetitions.

For static exercises, such as bridges, begin by holding the position for 20 seconds. Work your way up to holding the position for 1 minute.

Quality of exercise movement must be emphasized at all times. Modify the exercises or reduce the repetitions/time if you find that you cannot maintain good technique throughout the exercise.

Circuit Training – Week 3 & 4

Now you can begin to move into the weight room for your strengthening exercises. Start your program by doing your exercises in a Circuit format. A Circuit involves completing a set number of repetitions or duration of time and then moving on to the next exercise.

A sample circuit could include the following:

- 1) **Bench Press**
- 2) **Squats (or lunges)**
- 3) **Seated Rowing**
- 4) **Hamstring Curls**
- 5) **Pull Downs (Lat Pulls)**
- 6) **Calf Raises**
- 7) **Tricep extensions**

You can start Circuit training by completing 30 seconds of work followed by 30 seconds of rest. During the work period, complete as many repetitions as you can with a light weight and moderate tempo. Be careful to maintain proper technique throughout each exercise. This will allow you to develop proper skill for heavier loads in the latter part of your program. Begin by going through the complete circuit(7 stations) 2 times. You can build up to 3 times as you begin to improve.

Remember to include some focused abdominal and stability work at the end of the Circuit Training session. You can use the same routine as you did in Weeks 1 & 2. The total workout time is approximately 1 hour.

As you complete the circuit, you may notice that your heart rate is climbing. This is one of the added benefits of using a circuit for your transfer training. The additional aerobic work will compliment the aerobic foundation you are building in your swimming, cycling and running.

The 4 week Transfer plan should allow you to begin your regular strength training program with a minimum of muscle soreness. This will help you to stick with your program and maintain you're your fitness in swimming, cycling and running.

Improved strength training will improve your performance in all 3 disciplines and help you to stay healthy as you emerge from winter and into next summer's triathlon season.