

Sports Medicine: Changing seasons

Written by John Tomberlin

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A teenage athlete just completed their competitive winter sports season. They aren't as much fun to be around at home. Their appetite seems to be waning. They are crankier and more tired than usual, and it seems they've lost their motivation.

The athlete complains they feel like they are in a tough spot. The spring sports coach wants them to join in the tail-end of the "off-season" conditioning program with their spring sport teammates to build camaraderie; official practice starts in two weeks. How can they possibly get ready for the upcoming competitive spring sports season?

Here are some healthy tips for parents, athletes and coaches to help answer that question:

PARENTS: Facilitate Recovery

1. Don't panic. The "crash" at the end of a long and competitive season is very common.

The physical and psychological stresses of participating in a competitive sport can take their toll on your teenager. They need some time away from the day-to-day pressures of training and competition. Give your kids some personal space and time to themselves.

2. Get your kids to talk. Encourage open discussions about how they feel about the season ending and the upcoming season starting.

3. Encourage non-sport activities. Provide them with opportunities to relax!

4. Provide healthy food options and encourage them to get some restorative sleep.

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5. If your teenager has unresolved aches/pains, or you believe they are injured, seek advice from your sports medicine professional as soon as possible.

ATHLETES: Relax, Restore, Recover

You just peaked competitively, so relax a bit! Give yourself a break and enjoy your friends, family, school and life. Sports will still be there when you start practices for your next sport.

Seek out your school athletic trainer or your sports medicine specialists for any unresolved aches/pains, especially if you think you are injured. If you are sluggish and feel “flat”, listen to your body. Healthy meals and 8-10 hours of restorative sleep per night are important keys to recovery. Drink plenty of fluids.

Your legs will come back. Your desire will come back. You will recover!

COACHES: Teenage athletes need your guidance

1. If you are the “winter sport season coach”, don’t be too eager to immediately start off-season training for your sport. Your athletes need a break, and the upcoming spring sport season just became a priority for some of your athletes.

2. If you are the “spring sports season” coach, be realistic about your training/practice schedule. Kids who just finished a competitive sport season need “to get their legs back”, take care of aches and pains, and get mentally prepared to give you their best.

3. Read more about Periodization principles. These are practical and science-based principles for preparing your athletes for competition; getting the most out of them with your training methods; and preventing injury, overtraining and burnout.

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4. Mandate recovery. Your athletes will improve their performance and be injured less often, if you insist on balancing training with proper recovery.

These healthy tips can be useful for seasonal sport transitions as well as in-season advice for athletes who seem to have “hit the wall” with their conditioning or experience a noticeable drop in their performance during the season.

Sports science has proven that athletes thrive by:

1. Managing and eating a balanced healthy diet with proper fluid intake.
2. Balancing their moderate-to-intense training with proper recovery time.
3. Managing their sleep patterns by ensuring plenty of restorative sleep.

Here are a few web-friendly resources and books for additional reading:

Overtraining Syndrome and Athletes

<http://www.about.com/>

(Link via sports medicine, injuries, overtraining issues)

Sports Nutrition (Australian Institute of Sports)

<http://www.ausport.gov.au/ais/nutrition>

Sleeping vs Resting for Recovery.

<http://www.livestrong.com/>

(Link via living well, healthy sleeping, sleep cycle, sleeping vs. rest for recovery)

Enhancing Recovery: Preventing Underperformance in Athletes

(by Michael Kellerman, PhD 2002)

Periodization: Theory and Methodology of Training. 5th Edition, 2009

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(by Tudor Bompa PhD and G. Gregory Haff, PhD)

The Athlete's Guide to Recovery: Rest, Relax, and Restore for Peak Performance
Coming in Spring 2011. (by Sage Rountree)

EIDTOR'S NOTE: John Tomberlin has worked with high school athletes in the Metro area since 1995. He was a four-sport athlete in high school and a high school coach for two years in Illinois. He has more than 25 years of experience working with athletes as a physical therapist and a certified strength and conditioning specialist. He has worked with professional athletes in the NFL, MLB and on the PGA/LPGA tours. He also has worked with elite amateur athletes in alpine skiing, figure skating, and track and field.