



SFTriClub Indoor Spinning

Balancing the Yin & Yang of Sports Training

by Edith Chan, L.Ac.

As multisport athletes, we live a demanding lifestyle. We train in several sports, log big miles to build endurance, all while maintaining careers and relationships with friends and family. It's truly amazing how we manage it! Over the past decade of my involvement in this sport, I have seen many athletes come and go, often taking the sport very seriously, training hard, then getting burned out or injured. If there is one major issue plaguing our sport, it is that too many athletes keep a borderline obsessive-compulsive attitude, leading to overtraining and burnout. All too often, we forget the vital importance of balancing training and recovery, work and rest. Some of us may even feel *guilty* if we must miss a workout due to illness! Sound familiar?

Whether you view it from the Eastern or Western perspective, it is important to understand that optimal health, athletic longevity, and sports performance actually comes from a balanced lifestyle. The body can only grow strong with balanced doses of stress and recovery, work and rest, Yang and Yin. During a hard workout ("Yang"), the body is broken down and depleted from the workload. In the subsequent recovery period ("Yin"), it adapts to the stress and rebuilds fitter and stronger. It is during the recovery phase that the body gets stronger! In other words, fitness gains can only be achieved if there are balanced doses of both stress and recovery.

A periodized training plan with scheduled cycles of stress and recovery is a good starting point. However, smart athletes and great coaches recognize that the optimal balance-point is actually unique to each individual. Furthermore, it is a dynamic, ever-changing process. So the best individualized training programs are derived from mindful observations and a continual dialogue between athlete and coach.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) emphasizes the fact that we each have different constitutions, requiring highly individualized therapeutic programs to achieve health and healing. There is no such thing as "one-size-fits-all" treatment programs. In my opinion, sports training should be viewed in that same light. Besides differing constitutions and physiology, we each have varying stressors outside of sports training which also affects our response to workouts. So a training program that works for one athlete may not work as well for another. Furthermore, what worked for you last year might not produce the same results this year.

Chinese Medicine also views the mind-body-spirit complex as a seamless integrated unit. Every thought, every movement, every action is a manifestation of our body's Qi (vital energy)! So our athletic training must be viewed in the context of all the physical and emotional activities within our lives. This means that in addition to scheduling easier recovery days or weeks in your training, it is equally important to have relaxation time to quiet the mind, rejuvenate the body and just *be*. During scheduled recovery weeks, give yourself more rest from all activities, not just your sports training. Also understand that extra rest is especially important when healing a sports injury. So if you are ever sidelined by an injury, resist the temptation to replace all your training time with long exhausting hours at work, depleting your body's energy. By moderating all activities, the body can devote its resources to healing the injury and recovering more quickly.

If we are committed to our health, athletic longevity, and peak performance, then finding an optimal balance is a must. In doing so, we should take a holistic view of our sports training in the context of all the physical and emotional stressors we must manage in our lives.

When we truly listen to the body, use our commonsense and intuition, the answers are often already there. In juggling work, family, social life, and training, each of us must take ultimate responsibility for knowing ourselves and making smart individualized choices. Recognize the early signs of overtraining, illness, or injury. Be proactive in logging your responses to training. If you have a coach, work with him/her to finetune your program for optimal performance! Decades from now, I hope to see you still out there, healthy and vibrant in the 80+ age-groups!