

## The Transition Period

For many cyclists the off season is just around the corner. The “off season,” perhaps better named the Transition Period, is the training cycle that connects two seasons and is a great time to unwind a little and reflect on the previous racing year. How long should your Transition Period be? What else should you (and shouldn't) do this off-season?

The off season is a great time to treat your training like you did before you called it training. If you wake up and want to pedal, go for it. If it snowed 10 inches on the hill and you want to ski then load the car and head to the mountain. This is the least structured training cycle of the year. Here are a few Do's and Don'ts to help you get through the next few weeks.

-Don't cease all physical activity. Many athletes mistakenly think it's a good idea to take 2 (or more) weeks completely off. While this might be okay if you are overtrained or recovering from an injury, generally speaking full rest for two weeks is not advisable, especially if you want to see year to year gains. A study published in the Journal of Applied Physiology found a significant decrease in muscle enzyme activity as well as a 7% decrease in VO<sub>2</sub> after 3 weeks of rest. That's pretty significant, and it might be worse for older athletes. Maintaining a moderate amount of activity, even if it is not cycling specific, will help minimize these losses. Unstructured exercise will also help minimize winter weight gain.

-Do different activities. The primary emphasis of the off season is to restore motivation for the upcoming year. It's very important the athlete is excited to train, and a little detraining in the winter is better than burn out in spring or summer. There is no need to resume training before you are motivated. It will be a long year and the weather will get worse. Embrace this by doing different activities you enjoy. Running, skiing, hiking, or going to the gym are all great ways to maintain some aerobic fitness and help you get your exercise fix, minimize detraining, and recharge mentally for the next bike season.

-Don't let the transition period last more than 3-4 weeks. Generally speaking, elite cyclists (or even those looking to build on last years fitness gains) should limit this period to approximately 4 weeks. Cyclists who aren't particularly concerned with building on last year, or those who have faced significant motivation problems way before the season ends could extend the off season to 5 or 6 weeks.

-Look back at last year. How many races did you do and how did you handle that load? What were your goals and did you meet them? What motivated you last year, and how can you harness that motivation for next year? There's a lot to be learned from the past, take advantage of that with a good training diary.

-Do look ahead to next year. It's important to have a plan and make goals. The athletes I coach find that simply having a plan makes them far more likely to train than not having one. It gives purpose to their training and it's rewarded with progress. Goals are also critical to maintaining motivation and I encourage all athletes to have both long and short term goals. Goals should be specific, measurable, challenging, and have a time frame. “Improve my sprint,” although it sounds great, is not a good goal. “Increase 5 second power output by 10% before April 1<sup>st</sup>,” which is effectively the same goal, is more likely to be met.

-Lastly, the offseason is a great time to evaluate nagging injuries and address them with a proper bike fit or equipment change. It is certainly possible to swap out equipment in the middle of the season, but ideally this is done when volume and intensity is low so that the body has time to adapt to the new equipment.

The most important aspect of the off season is to recharge mentally and ideally this is done while still maintaining some level of physical exercise. Athletes should try to maintain about 50% of their normal weekly workload, but mostly through other forms of exercise. Lower volume or an off-season that lasts more than 4 weeks might risk significant detraining. Other off-season activities should include evaluation of the previous year, goal setting, injury prevention, and familiarization with new bike position or equipment.



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