

## Post-Exercise Recovery: 10 Ways to Help Your Body Recover Quicker

Whether your goal is to get in shape or you just finished your third marathon of the year, your body needs love and recovery time. Follow these tips to help your body recover more quickly and efficiently, so you can get back on your feet and hit the ground running!

1. **Don't skip the cool-down.** Continue moving at a low intensity for 5-10 minutes after your exercise. This gentle movement will help remove lactic acid from your muscles, thereby reducing muscle soreness and stiffness post-workout.
2. **Rehydrate.** We lose a lot of fluid when we exercise (through breathing and sweating), and it must be replaced. After all, the human body is almost 80% water! Water lubricates our joints and supports every metabolic function of every cell. It brings nutrients to our cells and is essential in removing wastes and toxins. Adequate fluid replacement is especially important for endurance athletes or people who are new to exercising. A good rule of thumb is to drink enough water each day to equal at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  your body weight in ounces—more if you have just exercised, during hot weather, or if you consume caffeinated beverages.
3. **Stretch.** A flexible muscle is a strong muscle. Adding 10-20 minutes of stretching pre- and post-exercise is a simple way to reduce muscle stiffness and soreness. Ideally, hold each stretch for 90 seconds (at least 60 seconds), and never stretch to a point that you feel pain. Be gentle!
4. **Re-fuel.** Having a nutritious meal or smoothie after you exercise is important, as it provides the muscle tissues with the nutrients needed to repair and be ready for the next workout session. Ideally, the meal should be full of colorful vegetables and fruits; rich in good fats (omega-3s—think fish or nuts!); and have a source of high-quality protein (fish, nuts, lean meats). It is best to eat 45 minutes after exercise. This give your body enough time to calm down so that it can digest properly, while still providing important nutrients to your fatigued muscles.
5. **Rest up.** Your body is equipped with an innate ability to heal itself, provided it is given the opportunity. Take a load off after your exercise sessions! Sit back, relax, pat yourself on the back, and allow your body to begin the healing process.
6. **Get a massage.** Having a massage not only feels great, it also improves the circulation of your blood and lymph. It allows you to relax, while also helping your body rid itself of toxicity and stress. If you don't have the time or money for a massage, try a self-massage, foam roller, Thera Cane, or other massage device,

which can provide some of the same benefits of a professional massage at a fraction of the price.

7. **Enjoy hydrotherapy.** A lot of professional athletes use ice baths, ice massage, or alternating hot and cold treatments immediately after exercise. These treatments serve to flush the muscles of lactic acid and waste products, leading to quicker recovery, reduced muscle soreness and injury prevention. A simple alternating hydrotherapy treatment can consist of three cycles of a 3-minute warm-water application followed immediately by a 30-second cold-water application. The more extreme the temperatures, the greater the circulatory benefits and the more your muscles get to “flush” away lactic acid. Take caution to avoid burning yourself during the warm-water application.
8. **Breathe deeply.** Generally speaking, during every breath we take, we inhale oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide is a waste produced by normal metabolic processes and is a byproduct of muscle contraction. Practicing deep breathing after an exercise session will help expel excess carbon dioxide, adequately oxygenate your recovering muscles, and provide a sense of relaxation after your strenuous workout session. Practice deep breathing by putting one hand on your abdomen and one hand on your chest. Inhale deeply, and focus on expanding your abdomen, rather than expanding your chest or allowing it to rise. Inhale for 4 counts, hold for 4 counts, exhale for 8 counts, and hold for 4 counts. Repeat.
9. **Perform dry skin brushing.** The lymphatic system is a delicate circulatory system that plays a role in immune function; delivers nutrients to your cells; and removes excess fluid and waste products. Dry skin brushing is a type of lymphatic massage and is excellent for moving cellular waste and toxicity out of the muscles. The technique for dry skin brushing involves short, rapid, feather-like strokes on the surface of the skin using a sea sponge or natural fiber loofah. Begin the lymphatic massage at the extremities and work towards the center of the body. This will return the lymph to the core to be filtered and redistributed.
10. **Get your Zzzzs.** A good night sleep is critical for exercise recovery, healing injuries, and overall mental and physical wellbeing. “Good sleep” not only involves the length of time you are asleep, but also the quality of that sleep. To ensure the best sleep possible, clear your mind before bed by meditating or writing down any thoughts floating around in your head, such as a to-do list for the following day, or a recap of the current day’s experiences. Create a routine. Your body (especially your adrenal glands) likes to go to sleep and wake up at the same time every day, even on the weekends. Sleep in a cool, quiet, pitch-black room. This helps promote the production of melatonin, a hormone in the body that promotes restful sleep. Wear an eye mask or ear plugs if necessary.



Tune in to your body's messages! Exercise is extremely important, but so is listening to your body. To avoid overtraining, injury, or getting sick, it is important to be present and listen to what your body needs. If you are feeling exhausted or excessively sore, you may need to take a break from training until your body has had ample time to recover. If you are beginning to feel run down, consider resting, and be gentle with your body to avoid getting sick. We often try to tune out or push through pain, fatigue or illness, but remember—it's there for a reason and may be your body's way of telling you to back off. While it's important to challenge yourself, be kind to your body in the process. Happy exercising!