



Get OFF the Bike to Keep Your Edge

by Deborah Jansen, with Patty Zylstra and Shelly De Ruiter

Although it may sound like a bad idea, getting off the bike for awhile actually can make us stronger. But, that doesn't mean we hit the couch and stay there—with a favorite beverage and a bag of chips.

Mix it Up

Winter gives us time to put something new into our lives. “Off season is a perfect time to get our bodies moving in all directions—that’s what prevents injuries,” said Shelly De Ruiter, physical therapist at Work Systems in Pella. “Bicycling at its best is back-and-forward movement. So, it’s important to include cross training workouts that offer side-to-side and rotation movements. Our bodies were designed to work in all three planes, so we need to let them do what they were created to do. That’s what keeps us healthy.”

Active cardio workouts that offer all three kinds of movement are aerobics, racquetball, basketball, hockey, roller blading, and soccer—just to name a few.

Workouts such as these also allow for intensity intervals that keep the heart rate in an aerobic zone. Moderate exercise such as walking, ballroom dancing, and ping pong are good exercise too, but these activities don't deliver the same cardio challenge.

That doesn't

mean you can't enjoy them—it just means you'll need to include additional workouts if you want to maintain fitness in the aerobic zone (heart rate at 70-80% of maximum).

Strengthen Your Core

In addition to cardio cross-training, off season also allows time to strengthen the body's core. More than just your “six-pack,” the core includes muscles in the torso and pelvis—back, abdominals, pelvic muscles, and even muscles that move the shoulder blades. Your trunk gives you strength and balance both on the bike and off.

“Cross Training For Cycling And Athletes,” an article on *Bicycling* magazine's web site recommends getting out of the saddle in off season. In fact, some pro riders believe the best cross-training sports are ones that get you the furthest away from your cycling regimen while still delivering great fitness benefits. Melanie McQuaid, a seven-time member of the Canadian national mountain bike team, plays squash (similar to racquetball). She says “Squash is a reaction sport, just like mountain biking, When you ride tricky descents, you use your feet and require lateral strength. I build that up playing squash.”

“Cross Training For Cycling And Athletes,” by Dimity McDowell



Join us on our Show'n Go Rides. Meet at the Volksweg Trailhead at the intersection of University and W. 5th St. Tuesdays, 6 p.m., Saturdays, 7:30 a.m.

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Although we often associate core strength training with weight lifting, it can also be done with a stability ball routine, yoga, pilates, martial arts, and even ballroom dancing. “Core muscles can get stronger when we introduce instability into our environment,” said Patty Zylstra, membership director at Work Systems in Pella. “Even sitting on a stability ball while lifting free weights works the core.”

This is also an area where a personal trainer or an instructor can be invaluable. “If our bodies aren’t aligned correctly, we can cause injury by making the same movement hundreds or thousands of times,” said Shelly. “It’s helpful to get feedback on alignment mistakes that we don’t realize we’re making.”

Lighten Up

Although Lance Armstrong confesses he sometimes gains 12 to 15 pounds in the off season, some of us don’t have his determination when spring cycling begins.

“Weight management or weight loss is easiest to do in off season,” Patty said. “While we’re focusing on a sport we enjoy, we don’t want to think about weight control. That’s too much to ask of ourselves.

“Often, just dropping 5 to 10 pounds affects how we feel and how our bodies respond,” Patty said. “When we don’t carry that weight up a hill, our heart can work more efficiently.”

Nutrition is one part of weight loss. “Eating the right foods helps us feel satisfied longer, and that’s 80 percent of the battle,” said Patty. “The other piece of weight control comes from participating in regular cardiovascular exercise. We can’t burn fat without exercise.”

Create Small, Incremental Goals

How does motivation enter the picture? What if I hate going to the gym? “I tell people you don’t have to become a gym rat to stay fit,” said Patty, “but you do need a plan. Most people have good intentions, but they don’t necessarily have a plan. That’s where a personal trainer comes in. We can help someone create small, incremental goals.”

Having an off-season reward doesn’t hurt either. “Since we tend to reward ourselves with food, it’s helpful to look forward to something else,” said Patty. “If I know I’m going to a beach or a ski slope in February, it’s easier for me to stay motivated. I want to stay in shape.”

