

# Training Protocols during times of COVID-19

*Tri Training Harder*

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## Do no harm

At Tri Training Harder, our philosophy is, and always will be to ensure the safety of the athletes we are working with as a result of our coaching and training sessions.

At these times, this philosophy still holds. However, with the world opening up, social media influences and a new era of virtual racing, we believe it is important to outline how we can deliver our promise of safety to you in this new field of play

Please read this carefully and ensure you recognise the importance of this collaborative approach where the athlete has a responsibility as much as the coach.

# COVID-19, exercise and immunity

We have been as open as we can about the information available on exercise and the immune system. Coach Alan wrote a summary [blog](#) on training and its effect on immunity. There are also other excellent articles on our COVID-19 [page](#). The significant takeaway from these articles are:

- Moderate exercising is shown to reduce the chances of picking up a viral infection
- Training that over-extends someone results in factors where the individual is more likely to pick up an infection after exercise.
- COVID-19 is new, and we have no complete knowledge of how this could impact athletes in the short term or the long term. Various studies are implying long-term cardiac, pulmonary and fatigue complications.
- If an athlete contracts COVID-19, there is a strong chance that they could be out of training effectively for many months. (See the [TRIIsolation](#) Show's Mind, body and COVID-19 section).
- There is currently no known vaccine
- Currently, there is no proof of immunity after contracting it.
- There are indications that anti-inflammatories can cause complications – with COVID-19. It is advised not to take anti-inflammatories unless specified.
- Vitamin D supplements are recommended.

The government and the governing bodies are providing limited insight on precisely what is best for athletes at the training level that our company operates at. Therefore, it is upon us to help our athletes gain an understanding of this scenario.

It is critical to note that any change in lockdown does not change any of the above effects.



# Field of play

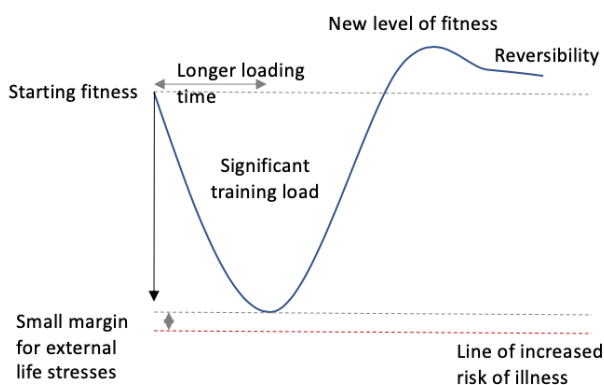
In this [article](#), we talk about how it is crucial as an athlete to play by the new rules of what is permissible. We have taken those very same rules and instigated the same approach to our coaching.

## Training Principles during COVID-19

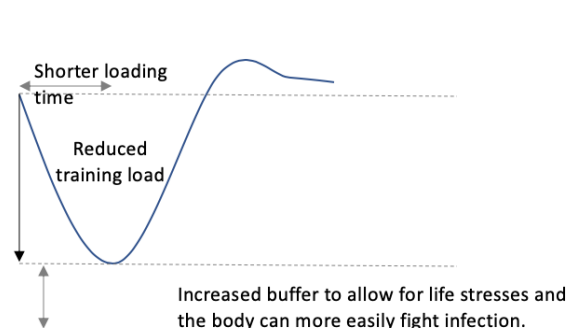
Therefore, given the information above, we must do everything in our power to protect the health of our athletes. As a result, we will focus on the controllable parts of this.

Fitness is improved by imposing a dose of training and allowing the person to recover and bounce up to a new level of fitness. In normal times, we may be able to impose quite a significant dose of training and get a substantial leap in fitness if the athlete recovers. However, given the additional stresses everyone is under (and we recognise each person is different), we want to ensure the training load is reduced to safer levels. This reduction will ensure we do not overreach, and we can ensure that all our recovery principles are excellent. We have spoken about this at many of our athlete Q&A sessions in particular care should be taken to ensure that athletes are sleeping well, resting effectively, eating nutritiously (any weight management is limited at this time – and certainly then no hard sessions).

### Normal Training Procedure



### TTH COVID-19 Training Principles



The extent of how limited the training load is imposed on the athlete can be decided by the coach and is dependent on the athlete's situation. As an example, here are some factors that may mean the training load should be carefully reduced more than average:

- Significant interaction with others in the workplace
- Living with, or in close proximity to healthcare practitioners on the front line
- Someone who is dealing with significant and obvious other stressors (e.g. financial uncertainty, relationship break up, other life stressors, etc.)

Since we are all a long way off from racing properly, there is no rush.

To facilitate with these recovery metrics, athletes are advised to keep a track of key recovery metrics:

- Sleep quality and quantity
- Mood
- Fatigue levels
- Motivation
- Joy
- Heart rate variability (if you have the means to record it)

This will ensure that there is a check for both the athlete and the coach at any of these sort of 'hard' times.



# Change of Lockdown rules

As is shown by the recent 'back to normal' approach of certain people, at any point of change in lockdown rules, there is a strong chance that we will have an increased risk of catching COVID-19. Therefore, we are recommending a phased shift a couple of weeks after the initial changes to lockdown rules to add a level of safety. Remember, we do not want to have an athlete ill for many months. A few extra days working at the same level of support is no bad thing.

Any time there is a relaxation of the regulations, take extra care. This is the point where infections are likely to increase.

## What to do if you have COVID-19

People will have varying degrees of severity of COVID-19. However, how we treat the first few days seem to help or hinder the recovery process.

[British Triathlon](#) has released some information on how to respond as has [British Athletics](#).

For ease and simplicity, here is a simple guide:

1. Stop all training the minute you have any symptoms
2. Wait for seven days after you have last had symptoms before training (exercising) again
3. Work with your coach to come back to training VERY slowly – Do not expect too much too soon.

To provide an approximate guideline, this could mean over a month from the first symptom to a return to more accustomed training levels again: allow for three months.

If you are hospitalised, we strongly advise that you undergo full tests to ensure you are safe to return to sport to the level you want to compete at.

# Swimming

It is unlikely swimming pools will be open up any time soon. Therefore, we must rely on open water venues and dry land swimming. British Triathlon and the Royal Life Savers Society have [worked together](#) to promote safe open water swimming. Their guidance can be found [here](#).

Considerations must be made around open water swimming. As a coach, there needs to be a real consideration of the training effect you hope to gain by swimming now when the water is colder.

Additionally, we would recommend considering the following points:

- Be aware of the effects of cold water and your body's response. If you are aware, you are more likely to make a good decision about swimming safely. Ignorance could mean you end up in avoidable difficulties
- Venues may be open to swim, but changing facilities, showers etc. are unlikely to be open as well. Therefore, have a sound plan on how to get warm straight after the session.
- Events may be cancelled when the temperature of the water is below 15 degrees. Anything below 11 degrees will be cancelled. You must also consider the air temperature and the wind chill. This will impact how you intend to get warm
- You cannot ask for help from someone outside your household. So you will need to get into your wetsuit on your own.
- Never swim alone.





# Cycling

Though cycling outdoors has never been banned in the UK, we have been cautious at advising it due to the possibility of any bike accidents adding load to the healthcare systems, but we all love riding our bikes outside!

If you have been on the indoor trainers, then we cannot remind you enough that before you head out, spend a short time doing some technical skills on the bike to remind yourself how to balance it again! Technical sessions are free speed anyway, but well worth doing before you jump back outside. If nothing else, it avoids embarrassing stories like forgetting to turn corners!

There has also been [research](#) indicating that though 2m is the recommended social distancing separation, it is advised at making that 10m when running and 20m when cycling behind people. Perhaps this will help athletes understand the implications of drafting.

# Running

Running has been one area we can work on effectively this period, and we have seen some great training adaptations. Again, athletes should take care when running behind other people (extend that distance to 10m). Running drives the highest likelihood of injury. Therefore, extra care needs to be taken when increasing running mileage or intensity. If you are looking at racing (see below) make sure you are suitably ready to get back into training routines.





# Psychological impact

There is no doubt that exercise is an excellent way of managing anxiety and other mental health issues.

[Dr Mark Bellamy](#) has raised the point a few times in his [talks](#) (Password: 3S@.^GxC). However, if you feel you “need” to do something for a mental health reason, you must recognise that as you say you need to do something, you are carrying more stress. Now is the time to focus on something shorter and something easier which won’t also impose training stress on your system. In other words, getting outside for a ride is a great way to alleviate stress and boost morale. However, if this needs to be 7 hours, then you need to address the fact you are wearing your buffer thin. The same is true for racing. If you feel that that intensity is “needed” then it is a sign that the opposite is true. Be kind to yourself, and try the race the next day.

We have written [extensively](#) on the negative impact (and it was mentioned in the coaches panel at the TRIIsolation show) of social media. This is especially true as more people are ‘bragging’ about their training now. We can assure you that this is just the echo chamber of social media and actually now, slow and steady will win the real races later in the season.

Above all, reach out and communicate to your coach or even Mark Bellamy. We are all here to help.

# Physio availability

Another cause for caution is the lack of any athlete support. From soft tissue massage to physiotherapy, athletes are isolated from their usual support networks. As such, athletes must take their own responsibility on flagging any niggles or injuries well in advance and not power through this. An endurance athlete has the mentality of perseverance. However, any small niggle now left unattended could very well result in an inability to exercise or train until lockdown ceases and you are able to physically reach and touch those support systems again.

# Racing

With races being postponed or cancelled, and virtual racing springing up, we felt it was essential to address some key points around racing in person or otherwise.

We would also like to point out that one of the significant factors around larger-scale racing is going to be the impact of COVID-19 on travel. Should the travel situation remain as it is, it may simply be unfeasible for competitors to travel to a destination and race. Furthermore, it may be smaller sized races enforced by social distancing rules means that events may have to cancel due to it not being commercially viable.

Be prepared for race cancellations and keep an eye on what is happening.

## Time until real races

All governing bodies and global race organisers and stakeholders are keen to see racing happening as soon as is safely possible. There almost certainly will be changes to the typical/traditional approach to racing, so bear with the organisers as they begin to understand what that could look like.

Realistically racing is unlikely to happen until the second half of the summer or early autumn at best. Therefore, we need to prepare for the racing at our peak in the second half of the season.

There are three subsequent and important points to take from this:

1. We have to be fresh later in the season than ever before, and so we are at least three months away from real racing (think about where that puts your typical season preparation in terms of months).

2. With a later and arguably prolonged season, many people are likely to push their season towards the winter months. The 2021 season is likely to restart earlier too, which means that the 2021 season is likely to be packed. We want to ensure we hit this shortened and what will be a longer season as fresh as we can. Now is the time to slow down!
3. Should events go ahead in the autumn, we are likely to see a high density of racing in the autumn period. This will have a higher load and so we want to ensure we build into that period properly.

As a way of reference, the ITU suggested that athletes need at least six weeks of normal training before returning to competition. Clearly, there is more structure and enforceable protocols in a performance squad like that, but at the same time, they can work to ensure the athlete's welfare is looked after more easily than amateurs can.

## Virtual racing and our approach to it

Virtual racing is gaining in popularity. Kicked off with some Zwift Pro series, we are seeing IRONMAN, Castle series, Zwift along with a whole host of other events.

To date, our approach has been to avoid them. Going forwards, given the physical rather than virtual season is where the real kudos, virtual races have to be seen as opportunities for a training effect or a camaraderie in training. However, any virtual racing must be done with the utmost care and in line with the training principles above. We must ensure that athletes are fresh for the race, and they have ample recovery afterwards. Athletes should taper into these events and should recover sensibly afterwards. A race will push an athlete deeper into their buffer than other sessions, and so, they must be completed higher up the side of the hole! For coaches, this would mean looking at positive TSB values before and waiting for positive TSB values after the event.

Tapering and recovering will have implications on the fitness gains and as such, racing should be few and far between. To balance performance and fitness gains. In many instances, this will mean reduced race durations or distances.

## “Crazy Challenges”

Crazy challenges sit in the same place as races. However, they need to be considered against the athlete’s normal fitness levels. “What is the training need” to do this. Now is not the time to randomly add in 150-mile rides because athletes have more time unless it is built slowly over a period of weeks.

It should be noted that many people have had slight flavour fatigue for donating money.





# Athlete Responsibility

Fundamentally, it is an athlete's responsibility to make decisions on their health and best training practice because only they are best placed to understand all the factors that affect the decision (personal risk, home or work situation, motivations, needs and critically how they feel day to day). We hope that the information we are providing here helps you make informed decisions and also gives you an understanding of where we are coming from so we can make decisions that are aligned together.

**At all times medical and local governmental advice comes before any of this guidance. This is for information only.**

The only tip we can give now is to err on the side of caution. We are all wanting to work together to do the best for you.

*The Tri Training Harder Coaching Team*

