

Personal Fitness Tips

Pre-trip Training for Adventures in the Wilderness

Off Track Adventures would like to see you gain the greatest benefit and success from your wilderness experience. Personal fitness is one of the keys to this and that is why Off Track Adventures has provided some pointers to get you started. Some solid work on your part may be required. Ideally, you should try to put aside approximately one hour per day to train with perhaps longer events in the weekends, but whatever you can manage will be a step in the right direction.

If you are based in a city, then the gym will be the obvious place to start, but try and do as much as possible outdoors e.g. rather than walking up and down stairs for one hour, try hill walking instead. This will not only be better for your lungs, but you will also get you used to walking in heavier boots and walking efficiently on uneven ground. When you are working out in the gym, you are probably wearing shorts and a t-shirt. Keep in mind that on your trip you could be wearing heavy boots through mud or with crampons in snow, as well as layers of outdoor clothing, and carrying a pack with all of your gear in it, so trying to simulate this will help.

Walking in soft sand is excellent training for the legs. If available, sand dunes are great for climbing up and down.

Try to mix long endurance exercise with some short fast cardio work outs. Cycling can be useful to add to your walking. Again, hills are a must to get the best from your fitness training and wind trainer cycling is fantastic. You can often feel like you are not working out very hard because you are sitting down and you will be amazed at how much you sweat on one of those bikes. Remember to keep the fluids up, particularly when doing cardio work outs. On a wind trainer you should be able to consume at least one litre of water easily whilst you are exercising. Proper hydration will assist in your recovery and ability to work out several days in a row.

When exercising for a decent length of time (e.g. over 40 minutes), working at say 65% of your maximum heart rate or at over capacity (average jogging), you burn up instant muscle glycogen. You need to replace this muscle glycogen or muscle fuel or else you will have tired muscles for the next 1-2 days. Obviously, this is not quick recovery. To avoid this, eat within 20 minutes of completing your work out. This can be difficult if you are showering and taking a sauna etc. at the gym, but eating within the next 30 minutes after exercise when the body is still aerobically metabolising and is in muscle glycogen conversion mode will 'repay' the 'debt' of muscle fuel

and will quicken recovery so you will be ready to exercise again the next day.

If you are planning on doing any big days of exercise, keep eating small amounts frequently, approximately every 40 minutes - 1 hour. This also applies to water and electrolyte drinks. Electrolytes are necessary for proper muscle and nerve functions, so electrolytes are very important for long days. Even if you are not exerting yourself, you will still use up a lot of electrolytes over the course of a few hours. Mix in 1/2 a teaspoon of salt with 1 litre of water, if you expect to be sweating. You can also combine this with electrolyte supplements if you wish. Salty crackers (with avocado) are an ideal snack food for long hikes. Warming down after exercise is also very important. Warming down speeds recovery by flushing lactic acids and other waste products from your muscles after strenuous exercise. Warming down after exercise also aids sleep.

Ensure you get enough rest and recovery time in between periods of exercise e.g. try not to do two days of rigorous exercise in a row. If you miss a day because you were too tired, don't be too hard on yourself. Instead, try to relax and get as much rest as possible. This way you will be more motivated to get out there again the next day.

Lastly, listen to your body. Listening to your body will decrease the chances of an over-use injury occurring. Sometimes you may feel that small nagging pain in a particular area. This type of pain is often easy to ignore (we often train ourselves to ignore these pains). Remember, pain usually occurs when our body is trying to tell us that it does not want to do what we are trying to make it do. Listen to your body and be aware that ignoring pain (particularly small nagging pain) may result in an over-use injury. Not all pain is the early stages of an over-use injury; it may just be that you need to change your technique.

Try to make your exercise programme fun and imagine yourself climbing through New Zealand's amazing high places without effort and really enjoying your experience. That should guarantee a smile. ?