

# What to do when you have forced time off the bike

Even the most serious cyclists run into times when they can't ride for one of many reasons. It's usually due to business travel or family vacations or holidays where you are forced to take time off your bike for anywhere from one day to a week. Sometimes it may be due to an illness which knocks you out for several days. Dedicated cyclists sometimes freak out when faced with the prospect of being off their bike for several days in a row. What can you do to minimize the damage from down time so you don't lose too much fitness?

Well, first, relax. You don't lose fitness nearly as quickly as you may think. You tend to lose your top end fitness first, the kind you build by doing intense intervals in the anaerobic zone. Your endurance goes away very slowly so even if you go a week without riding you probably won't notice any change. In fact, you may likely notice that when you get back on your bike, you will be riding faster than ever. Why is that? It's because you've finally been forced to give your body a complete rest. If you are smart, you train hard one day and then take it easy the next so you can recover for subsequent hard workouts. But taking it easy for a day or two doesn't completely allow the body to recover and refresh. It recovers enough to hit it hard again, but you are always in somewhat of a state of chronic fatigue. If you manage your training well, you can sustain this low level fatigue for quite some time. However, once in a while it's a good idea to take a few days off in a row to allow your body to fully rest, heal and recover. It also does the mind good as well. If you have been pushing hard training for several months without a break, your head might be needing a break from the training too.

However, even with a forced break from the bike, it's a good idea to try to maintain your activity level during your time away. Feel free to take the first day or two off completely. You may notice you are more sleepy than normal as you let your body relax and let your metabolism slow down. But don't take more than two days completely off. Try to do something to keep active by the third day. Your body is used to being very active and will function better if you are moving around. If you are on vacation, you may get the chance to walk or be active, depending on what you are doing. At the very least, try to get out for a walk or two each day. A good reason for staying active is that when you are traveling and have a change of routine, you eat different foods and may eat more than you need, so keep moving so you don't gain too much while off your bike. Don't be surprised or alarmed if you gain 2-3 pounds while away. It will come off once you get back to your regular training routine. Any more than that though and you may have to work a little harder to get it off.

Here are some suggestions for cross training while traveling.

- Go for a walk, hike or jog
- Climb stairs – works well if you are cooped up in a high rise hotel in a city
- Use a gym. Most hotels have some sort of gym that is good enough to get your heart rate up. Otherwise seek out a local gym and get a one-day or one-week pass. Try the stair climber or elliptical machine as these work leg muscles similarly to cycling. Or lift some weights and work on core strength.
- Go swimming if a pool is available
- Rent or borrow a bike if possible. It's fun to explore and occasionally get lost riding around a new area.

Regardless of the type of exercise you do, every few days try to get your heart rate up for a sustained period (e.g. 30 minutes) close to your anaerobic threshold. Bring along your heart rate monitor so you can make sure you are hitting your target levels. Even if you are on a stair

climbing machine, you can still do heart rate based intervals. But don't get too hung up on doing hard workouts. After all, you want to use this opportunity to give your body a rest. Just get your heart rate up to threshold for a short while a couple of times will do wonders for maintaining your fitness level.

So the next time the boss tells you about a week-long conference you need to go to, don't despair. Look at it as a welcomed break from your cycling training routine. You should come back refreshed and ready to ride and you may just find that you are riding better than ever.

All the best in training, even when not riding!  
Coach David Ertl

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