

Ease up gradually when you're beat

An unpleasant end product of strenuous exercise is fatigue — sometimes even exhaustion.

Although it may seem paradoxical, light exercise actually reduces fatigue better than passive resting.

Most people still believe "passive rest" will hasten their recovery from vigorous exercise. Research suggests, however, that an "active rest" when you're feeling fatigued will revitalize you faster than remaining motionless.

In the early 1900s, scientists discovered that after fatigue was produced in a subject's arm by strenuous exercise, the arm recovered faster if the other arm or the legs continued exercising, rather than resting.

Several years later it was shown that when the post-exercise activity was "moderately" intense, the fatigued muscles recovered faster. But when the activity was "too" intense, recovery was delayed.

PHYSIOLOGISTS recently have demonstrated that rhythmic physical activity immediately after exercise helps to remove and utilize the waste products of exercise metabolism — specifically a body chemical called lactic acid.

This appears particularly important because high levels of lactic acid cause muscular fatigue. Thus, if your blood circulation remains increased, removal of lactic acid is enhanced, and your recovery is facilitated.

fitness Barry Franklin

These findings provide a physiologic basis for the recommendation that you walk or jog intermittently between vigorous exercise bouts rather than sit or lie down.

This method of hastening recuperation is important in any activity in which a rapid recovery between bouts of activity is essential.

THERE ARE many situations in which you can effectively apply the "active rest" principle. For example:

• The distance runner who approaches the finish line but feels just too exhausted to continue would be well advised to reduce his run to a fast walk or slow jog rather than stopping completely.

• If you play racquet sports, try stroking the ball in an easy manner between games or sets. You may just find that you'll be better recovered when you start your next game than if you had rested between matches.

The writer is co-director of cardiac rehabilitation at Sinai Hospital.

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