



Series: Training Tools Get Personal

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Part 3: Putting It All Together

In Part 2 of this series, we discussed how to choose among the “Big 4” training tools: heart rate monitors, GPS-based devices, power meters, and metabolic meters. Now let’s talk about how to put your chosen training tool(s) to intelligent use.

Don’t Fall Into the Speed Trap

You’re not doing yourself (or your training tool) justice if you’re just using it as a speedometer. Meters and monitors are essential tools for **managing** your training. They let you create better training plans and programs, day-to-day and long-term.

How do they do it? The highest function of each of the Big 4 tools, in their various ways, is to allow you to measure and manage your body’s adaptation to training stresses. There are four interconnected, global stresses that must be regularly measured and accounted for by anyone who is serious about their training:

1. *Physiological stresses*
2. *Biomechanical stresses*
3. *Psychological and emotional stresses*
4. *Metabolic stresses*

Why do these stresses matter? Let’s take a look at a few classic training quandaries: Should you be increasing or decreasing your training load? Should you take a day off? Is your training program even working? With the help of your training tool, you know the answers.

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Seven Questions to Answer with Your Training Tools

1. **Are you training easily enough? On recovery days, it's essential to** do the right thing and train at a lower effort. A heart rate monitor can keep you honest by letting you know whether you are staying in the “low zones” when you are supposed to.
2. **Are you training hard enough?** On the days that you've scheduled intense workouts, you need to push into the higher effort zones that are essential for adaptation in your body (the “training effect”) to occur. Training tools keep you on target.
3. **Is the planned workout too hard?** There are training days that you need to back off and say “it's not my day.” A good example is a quality hill workout ride – you find out that you can't hit your heart rate percentages regardless of motivation and the perception of the effort. This is a time to toss in the towel and not push the ride, because your heart is saying that it not worth the risk of overtraining or staleness.
4. **Is the planned workout too easy?** If, day after day, you find that your workouts are not pushing your heart rate as high as it used to go, it's time to rewrite your training program to incorporate bouts of harder effort and, thus, more training stress.
5. **Have you recovered between training bouts? Adequate recovery** between workouts is essential for the training effect. One way of ensuring this is a simple heart rate test during your warm-up time. Take your heart rate to 70% of your maximum or 80% of your Threshold for 2 minutes and then drop back for 30 seconds and see how quickly you recover in that time. If you see a drop of 10-20 bpm this is a positive indication that you are rested. If you cannot reach that, your tool is telling you to drop down a zone in your training or maybe even take the day off.
6. **Have you recovered between training *intervals*?** Intervals are repeats or repetitions of high intensity time followed by recovery time and a drop of intensity immediately followed by another period of high intensity. The time between the work interval, high intensity, and the rest interval is called recovery time. If your inter-recovery time is getting longer with each repeat or if you are not recovering adequately between work:rest time, it is an indicator of over training in your training program.
7. **Are you getting fitter? Using a training tool for fitness testing** is one of the easiest ways to see real improvement from your training. Do at least one fitness assessment within your training time per week. Log the results and compare the results over time. If you're not getting fitter, that is, if your training program isn't working, it's time for an overhaul.

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Eight Tips to Getting the Most from Training Tools

- 1. Read the Manual.** Really. I read all of the documentation that comes with a tool, even today, more than 20 years after I first trained with a heart rate monitor. It's worth it. You may want to keep your manual with you for the first week, so you can refer to it as often as you like. Manuals can be frustrating. But stick with it.
- 2. Use the One-Week Rule.** If you are new to tool-based training, don't expect to grasp everything at once. Give yourself a week of using your monitor, and you'll find that you fall in love with the power of the information it provides.
- 3. Get in Synch.** For the various pieces of a wireless system (as in a heart rate monitor or GPS device) to stay in touch, the different parts must synchronize or connect with each other. Transmitters must connect to receivers. Transceivers must connect with satellites. So, before you take off for a ride or a test, make sure that your monitoring devices are in touch.
- 4. Play by the Numbers.** A training tool can tell you the intensity, the energy output, the internal and external stresses, the exact location of where you were and where you are, the force that you are applying to the pedals. So, use these numbers. Let the data serve as your coach, your motivation, your reference point, and most of all, your friend. Respond to changes in the numbers, and use them to manage your training plan.
- 5. Perform Regular Maintenance.** You do regular bike maintenance. You check the treads of your running shoes. Do the same with your training tools. Make sure they are calibrated. Don't misuse them. For example, don't push any buttons on your heart rate monitor when it's underwater, because that increases the risk of leaking. Pay attention, if you have downloadable tools, to upgrades to the latest application and platform software. Look for new third-party software providers to complement your tool and give it more power.
- 6. Do a Battery Check.** Changing the battery is a task best left to the manufacturer or the specialist. But what you can do is frequently check the battery levels of your training tools – it's disappointing to be in the middle of a race and watch your monitor die.
- 7. Accessorize.** Get the most out of your meters and monitors. Books and videos help you get past the learning curve quickly. Try seminars or workshops. Find out how to extend the application of the tool – for example, how to best use your monitor when cycling, or for stress reduction, weight loss, or general fitness. There are newsletters – fee and free – that you can subscribe to, to stay current and informed.
- 8. Last, but not Least, Please Trust the Tool.** I often hear stories from individuals who think their monitor is broken because they don't think the numbers are right. Occasionally, there is a data interruption or "dirty" data, but most often, the monitor is right and the person's perception of their efforts are off. Environmental, social, physiological, neuromuscular, hormonal, psychological, and emotional factors have an enormous impact on our bodies. And training tools often know this long before we do.

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Sally Edwards is a former Master's World Record holder in the Ironman Triathlon. From the time she ran the 1984 Olympic Marathon Trials using her heart rate monitor, Sally has been at the forefront of a revolution in fitness training. A founder of the sport of triathlon (and a Triathlon Hall of Fame inductee), most of Sally's recent races have been performed in her role as the National Spokeswoman for the Danskin Triathlon Series.

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