# Overtraining - Learn how to identify Overtraining Syndrome

## Use the Quick-Reference Symptoms List below to identify overtraining and stop it before it's too late.

Do you know the difference between being just a little tired or on a down-cycle, and being legitimately run down or over tired?

It's important to be able to tell the difference if you want to stay injury free. Nothing will put a stop to your fitness goals more quickly than not being able to recognise when you're legitimately run down and over tired.

One of the biggest challenges to achieving your fitness goals is consistency. If you're repeatedly getting sick, run down and overtrained it becomes very difficult to stay injury free. So, how do you keep the consistency of [regular exercise](http://www.thestretchinghandbook.com/archives/fitt-principle.php), without over doing it and becoming sick or injured?

Amateur and professional athletes alike are constantly battling with the problem of overtraining. Being able to juggle just the right amount of training, with enough sleep and rest, and the perfect nutritional diet is not an easy act to master. Throw in a career and a family and it becomes near impossible.

**What is overtraining?**

Overtraining is the result of giving your body more work or stress than it can handle. Overtraining occurs when a person experiences stress and physical trauma from exercise faster than their body can repair the damage.

Now this doesn't happen overnight, or as a result of one or two work-outs. In fact, regular exercise is extremely beneficial to your general health and fitness, but you must remember that it's exercise that breaks your body down, while it's the rest and recovery that makes you stronger and healthier. Improvements only occur during the times of rest.

Remember stress can come from a multitude of sources. It's not just physical stress that causes overtraining. Sure, excessive exercise may lead to overtraining, but don't forget to consider other stresses, such as family or work commitments. Remember, stress is stress, whether it's a physical, mental or emotional stress, it still has the same effect on your health and well-being.

**Reading The Signs**

At this point in time there are no tests which can be performed to determine whether you are over trained or not. You can't go to your local doctor or even a sports medicine laboratory and ask for a test for overtraining. However, while there are no tests for overtraining, there are a number of signs and symptoms that you should be on the lookout for. These signs and symptoms should act as a warning bell, which will give you advanced notice of possible dangers to come.

There are quite a number of signs and symptoms to be on the lookout for. To make it easier for you to recognise them I've grouped them into either physical or psychological signs and symptoms.

Now, suffering from any one or two of the following signs or symptoms doesn't automatically mean you are suffering from overtraining. However, if you recognise a number, say 5 or 6 of the following signs and symptoms, then it may be time to take a close look at the volume and intensity of your work load.

**Physical Signs & Symptoms**

* Elevated resting pulse / heart rate
* Frequent minor infections
* Increased susceptibility to colds and flu's
* Increases in minor injuries
* Chronic muscle soreness or joint pain
* Exhaustion
* Lethargy
* Weight loss
* Appetite loss
* Insatiable thirst or dehydration
* Intolerance to exercise
* Decreased performance
* Delayed recovery from exercise

**Psychological Signs & Symptoms**

* Fatigued, tired, drained, lack of energy
* Reduced ability to concentrate
* Apathy or no motivation
* Irritability
* Anxiety
* Depression
* Headaches
* Insomnia
* Inability to relax
* Twitchy, fidgety or jittery

As you can see by the number of signs and symptoms there are a lot of things to look out for. Generally the most common signs and symptoms to look for are a total loss of motivation in all areas of your life (work or career, health and fitness etc.), plus a feeling of exhaustion. If these two warning signs are present, plus a couple of the other listed signs and symptoms, then it may be time to take a short rest before things get out of hand.

**The Answer to the Problem**

Okay, you feel run down and totally exhausted. You've got no motivation to do anything. You can't get rid of that niggling knee injury. You're irritable, depressed and have totally lost your appetite. Sounds like you're over trained. What do you do now?

As with most things, prevention is by far better than cure, so lets start by having a quick look at a few things you can do to prevent overtraining.

Only making small and gradual increases to your exercise program over a period of time. Eating a well balanced, nutritious diet. Ensuring adequate relaxation and sleep. Being prepared to modify your training to suit environmental conditions. For example, on a very hot day, going to the pool instead of out in the sun. Being able to monitor other stresses on your life and make adjustments to suit. Avoiding monotonous training, by varying your exercise as much as possible. Not exercising during an illness, and most of all be flexible and have some fun with what you do.

While prevention should always be your aim, there will be times when overtraining will occur and you'll need to know what to do to get back on track.

Your first priority is to put your feet up and take a rest. Anywhere from 3 to 5 days should do the trick, depending on how severe the overtraining is. During this time forget about exercise, your body needs a rest so give it one. A physical rest, as well as a mental rest. There's no point in beating yourself up mentally over losing a few days exercise.

Try to get as much sleep and relaxation as possible. Go to bed early and catch a nap whenever you can. Make sure you increase your intake of highly nutritious foods and take an extra dose of vitamins and minerals.

After the initial 3 to 5 days rest you can gradually get back into your normal exercise routine, but start off slowly. Most research states that it's okay to start off with the same intensity and time of exercise but cut back on the frequency. So if you would normally exercise 3 or 4 times a week, cut that back to only twice a week for the next week or two. After that you should be right to resume your normal exercise regime.

Sometimes it's a good idea to have a rest, like the one outlined above, whether you're feeling run down or not. It will give both your mind and body a chance to fully recover from any problems that may be building up without you even knowing it. It will also freshen you up, give you a renewed motivation and help you to look forward to your exercise again. Don't underestimate the benefits of a good rest.

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