



ERIN TAYLOR

WORKING

THE
ATHLETE'S
PLAN
FOR REAL
RECOVERY
AND
WINNING
RESULTS

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3002 Sterling Circle, Suite 100
Boulder, CO 80301–2338 USA

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Distributed in the United States and Canada by Ingram Publisher Services

A Cataloging-in-Publication record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.
ISBN 978-1-937715-77-9

This paper meets the requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (Permanence of Paper).

Cover design by Kevin Roberson

Interior design by Kevin Roberson and Vicki Hopewell

Photos by Claire Pepper, except pp. viii and x by Jess Barnard and p. 189 by Sarah Robinson

Women's apparel provided by Oiselle

18 19 20 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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INTRO

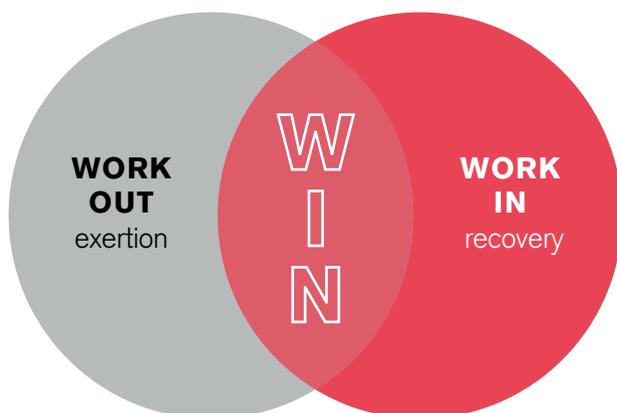
WORK IN FOR THE WIN

Athletes are familiar with going hard—after all, working out gets results. What few are familiar with is resting easy—working in also gets results. When you go hard you have to rest hard, too.

We live in a world where every millisecond matters. As athletes we are goal oriented and highly invested in achievement—we do everything possible to gain competitive advantage and win. We're connected and aware, tracking pace and distance and all available physiological metrics related to performance. We leverage every aspect of preparation—from personal coaching to high-tech gadgets—in an effort to refine and optimize our output and bring our goals within reach. But even with all the knowledge gained and miles logged, most of us still aren't aware how much working in matters. We have all this data about our workout, and in some cases advice about when to stop, but it doesn't tell us what to do next, nor is it tracking our recovery—our work in. And for those looking to stretch the boundaries of their potential, it's working in that's the real game changer.

Most athletes know recovery is important. From cooldown routines to meditation apps to self-massage tools, the means to aid the process have gained consideration and adoption in recent years. This is a step in the right direction, but we still lack the practical understanding and skills to recover in a meaningful way. The misconception remains that working out is the only path to increased performance. As a result, recovery is one of the least planned, underutilized tools to optimize performance. It's falsely perceived as a given on “rest days” and a separate, less important endeavor that happens by default when we're not working out.

The reality is that, in sports and in life, recovery is as important and equally as productive as everything else that you do. You need relaxation after exertion. Not only



that, when used together in an integrated way, working out and working in will help you become more balanced and resilient and close the gap between where you are now and where you want to be. If you're serious about your goals, you should be asking:

- ⇒ How do I recognize when it's time to slow down and allow myself to stop?
- ⇒ And when I do stop, what should I do?

This book exists to help you answer these questions for yourself, and it is designed to elevate your athletic experience using a simple framework that will help you feel the difference—and step up from bronze to silver, and from silver to gold. Like working out, working in requires an intentional approach. Luckily, you can activate recovery when you need it most and make a real impact in as little as 5 minutes a day.

Use these tools to work in for the win:

TRY IT: Quick tips to help you recharge anytime, anywhere.

WORK IN: Do the routines to optimize your recovery—on purpose.

GET REAL: Become more intentional and effective in your approach by thinking about what you're doing, and why.

Embracing recovery will make you a better athlete. Your body is asking you to work in. It's time to listen and respond.

Ready, set, recover!

A woman with her hair in a bun is sitting on a concrete ledge in a grassy field. She is wearing a white t-shirt with the text "ATHLETES FOR YOGA" printed on it. She is also wearing dark jeans and red sneakers. Her hands are resting on the grass on either side of her. The background is a blurred green lawn.

**ATHLETES
FOR
YOGA**

01



RETHINK RECOVERY

It's time to get real about recovery. You might already know that yoga and meditation can help athletic recovery, but the dots have to be connected. You have to do more than go to a yoga class, or close your eyes and set a timer. You'll get very little out of going through the motions of restorative activities—on or off the mat. To optimize recovery you have to reset your perception of rest and break your habit of resisting it.

It's how you work in that matters. It must become your new normal, a given every day. To do this, you have to bravely endeavor in the opposite direction of your usual mode of operation in order to blend your working out and working in to full advantage. The good news is that you already possess everything you need to recover for real right now. With practice, you can make the process of working in as habitual as working out. And it feels good, too.

REAL RECOVERY = Making recovery a practical,
integrated part of daily life

It's fitting that working out is called exactly that. It's an output, an energy expenditure in which you work against external factors—your feet hitting the pavement, your legs powering your bike, your arms pulling your body through the water, your muscles contracting against the weight in order to get the results you need to achieve your goals.

With practice, you've built your tolerance for working out. But without practicing your work in, you'll build more resistance than tolerance for real recovery.

Going hard comes easy because you are familiar with output. There's comfort in the familiarity of pushing yourself to your limits. You're conditioned to keep going and muscle your way through challenges. You attach a great deal of value to training, and rightfully so. And naturally, it feels counterintuitive that endeavoring in the opposite direction—working in—will move you toward your goals.

Sports and fitness pursuits are becoming more extreme, requiring more hours, more miles, and more output in general. Working out is not always a conscious choice you make; it's a familiar, comfortable—and often unintentional—habit. It's a hard habit to break, and one that makes you quick to say yes to doing more. You say yes enthusiastically because you're passionate about what you're doing and willing to do what



Go hard. Rest easy.

They aren't mutually exclusive.



it takes to win. But do you recognize when the workload is too heavy? And if you do, can you say yes to recovery with the same level of conviction? Or do you agonize about skipping a training session? Saying yes to going hard is much easier than saying yes to resting easy because working out feels like progress and working in feels like a hard stop.

Athletes also fail to decelerate because they don't recognize just how much they're doing and how tired they are. When you are always going it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between work and rest, between energy and fatigue. Being amped up feels normal. Your body forgets that there are other, equally important gears and paces. But frazzled is not fit. And being injured sucks.

Mental and physical stress—from the aches and pains that often linger post-workout to the pressures of competition—can wreak havoc on even the strongest of athletes. Depriving your body of focused recovery during a particularly grueling training program can cause your training to go haywire. Workouts tax your muscles, and those tissues cannot grow without ample time to repair. Energy is a limited yet renewable resource. It must be replenished through nutrition and rest. Without continual input, energy becomes more and more depleted, creating a deficit over time. The resulting fatigue lowers your mood and negatively affects your mental state, and, when left unaddressed, it can increase the risk of depression. All of these factors detract from the training you have put in and threaten your performance, leaving you feeling heavy and lethargic—and possibly even stagnant.

In pursuit of better performance, you keep looking for more ways to maximize output. But your body is already saturated with the physiological effects of your workouts. Many of these are not only positive but critical for growth: You become stronger as you train your body and mind to endure exertion, and chemicals like endorphins and serotonin linger post-workout, making you feel good—as does the satisfaction of a big effort or key training block completed. But continually muscling through can place an unsustainable load of stress on your system. While stress is a crucial ingredient for

**You know you
can power through,
but overpowering
your body is not
winning.**

growth, systematically overdoing it puts you at risk of under-recovering, which is the root cause of overtraining.

UNDER-RECOVERING = Trading input for more output

Without ample daily rest you fall into a deficit as you become oversaturated with the stress of your training, soaking you in a 24/7 bath of cortisol and other stress hormones because your body still thinks it's fighting through even when your workout is over. Your tissues actually break down under overtraining conditions. When you're in a hot bath and your fingertips become wrinkled and puckered, you have to get out of the water so they become smooth again. It's the same with your muscles and your mind. Rest factors into building strength and endurance because it takes time to adapt to the forces involved. Without rest, not only is it impossible to progress in a meaningful way because your hard work can't pay off to its maximum, but it's more likely that you'll regress. Continuing to push is like being on a treadmill, running without advancing. Instead of looking for more ways to put out, consider input as a tool to maximize your output. Stepping off the treadmill halts the output so that you can absorb all your hard work and reap the rewards. It gives you the opportunity to actually feel what you've done. It's also powerful injury and burnout mitigation. You can and should keep going hard. But don't miss out on the other end of the spectrum and underachieve because you are under-recovering.

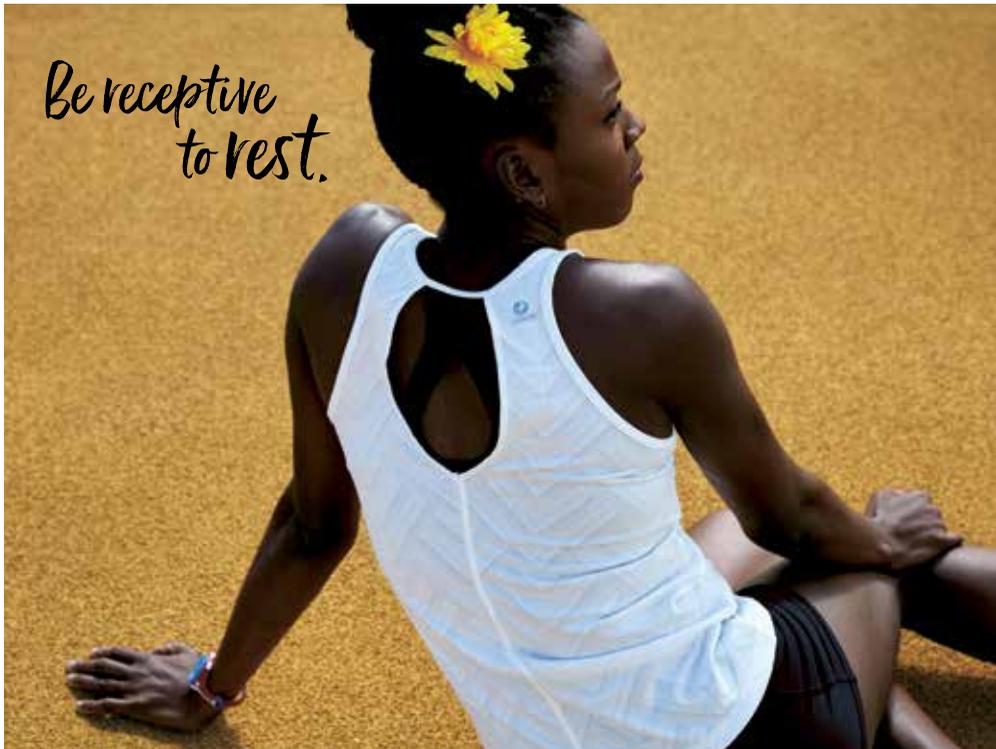
You've built up your tolerance for the discomfort of working out. Are you brave enough to build the same tolerance for the discomfort of working in?

Slow Down Significantly to Accelerate Radically

Working in—intentional, optimized recovery—is largely uncharted territory for athletes. It's like outer space—expansive and full of possibility and right in front of our eyes. To maximize your athletic potential, and to make the most of all your workouts, you have to shift your focus to the expanse within.

Don't mistake working in for “stopping” or lack of action—it will not happen by default when you're not actively training. Working out is an intentional expenditure, and so is working in. Just because recovery involves rest doesn't mean that it's a passive, sleepy state. Working in is a purposeful, engaged approach to optimizing your recovery.

Just like you have to fuel yourself with proper nutrition so that you have energy to feel and perform your best, you have to recover adequately every day so that your body and mind can return to equanimity and you can recharge for your next session.



REST DAYS DON'T ENSURE RECOVERY

Dedicated rest days are important, but don't confuse them with recovery because they're not the same thing and the two don't necessarily go hand in hand. Recovery is what your body is designed to do after training—a return to neutral that keeps your systems balanced and optimized and advances you toward your goals. A rest day is a dedicated time for recovery, void of any training related activities. The problem is, too many athletes have lost the ability to transition from working to not working, making it impossible to effectively recover on rest days.

Most athletes—and humans in general—are so geared up that they struggle to wind down and recover even when the opportunity presents itself (like a rest day). As much as you might like the idea of relaxing and even value the importance of dedicated recovery time, if your habit is to do the opposite it can be tough to give yourself permission to

slow down. And when you do finally create space to move in the opposite direction, it's likely to feel uncomfortable. You have to practice the transition. If a triathlete doesn't practice the transition from biking to running, the body is confused and it will show in the performance. Similarly, your body will resist rest if you don't intentionally practice the transition from training to recovering.

Scheduling rest days is admirable, but it's not enough. It's working in that helps your body become receptive to rest. You apply strength and courage to keep going even when your workouts get tough, and working in works the same way—don't back down. Working in helps you to manage the discomfort of shifting gears; it facilitates a smooth and effective transition from work to rest so that you can assimilate all of your effort, truly rest on your rest days, and recover for real.

Effective recovery isn't a
guaranteed result of a rest day.

Consistent input is the counterbalance to your consistent output. It helps you maintain stronger awareness of where you're at by pulling you out of the oversaturation of output so that you can adjust your cadence based on what is actually happening.

Use Your Nervous System

We tend to approach recovery with different tools and techniques—foam rollers, compression, massage, physical therapy, and even different approaches to sleep and nutrition. It's ironic that our restorative activities tend to first focus on our muscles, even though they are the part of our body that naturally recovers the quickest because they receive direct blood flow. You might be less aware of the system that has the biggest impact on your ability to restore body and mind after a big output: your nervous system.

Your autonomic nervous system regulates your body's instinctive, unconscious actions and influences the function of your internal organs. It includes your brain, spinal cord, and nerves; and it regulates many bodily functions, such as heart rate, digestion, blood pressure, and respiration—all of which keep you going and moving forward, and play a critical role in movement, exertion, and ultimately performance.

Your nervous system sounds the alarm by way of a chemical stress response when you're confronted with life-threatening events, often referred to as the “fight or flight” response. This is governed by your sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which under duress triggers a reaction where blood pressure increases to supply more oxygen to your brain and muscles, and all your systems are optimized for you to defend yourself or run for your life. Your focus narrows to meet the challenge. This is all incredibly useful if you're attacked in a dark alley. Or running from a tiger. Or, more likely, when the fight is on for first place or a new PR in the last 100 meters of your race.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, your relaxation response is governed by your parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)—this is where you rest and digest. Since your nervous system is designed for self-preservation, your PNS should kick in once threatening events have passed to slow your heart rate, aid in digestion, and return you to a baseline of calm. It broadens your perspective and helps you to be more aware of where you're at so that you can more clearly discern the most appropriate course



of action, rather than just react. Strengthening your PNS increases your resilience and helps you to more easefully manage whatever comes at you.

The problem is that because we are doing so much, all the time, we get stuck in fight or flight and can't wind down. As a result the SNS response is easily triggered by normal day-to-day occurrences like rushing to get to the gym, or triaging a full email inbox. When you're in this frame of mind your brain perceives the threat of failing to hit your pace in a key training session the same way it perceives the threat that you might be late for your meeting because you're stuck in traffic. While you need to get fired up to nail your workout, getting amped up in gridlock confuses your body with unnecessary stress and deprives you of spending time in a more relaxed state. The physiological design of the nervous system is disrupted by the pace of life. Stress management might be a big motivator of your workouts, but without consistent, effective PNS activation you're merely creating a vicious cycle of SNS stimulation.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN TO STOP?

It's hard to know when it's okay to slow your roll and, more important, when to allow yourself to stop. Don't wait for someone else to tell you to rest. You don't need permission. You are the only one who can put your foot on the brakes. Your performance and overall well-being will suffer if you power on. You might feel too busy to slow down, but, ironically, it is the times when you're most frazzled that it's critical for you to work in.

Your body will tell you everything you need to know about what it needs. Learn to listen to its cues. Here are some signals that your body is asking you to work in:

- ➔ Your breathing is erratic
- ➔ You're mentally unfocused or feel out of control
- ➔ You're finding it difficult to maintain a broad perspective

- ➔ You're "going through the motions" and not really getting the benefit out of your workouts
- ➔ You feel like you've hit a performance plateau
- ➔ Your workouts are adding to your everyday stress rather than helping you to manage it
- ➔ You find it difficult to wind down even when the opportunity for rest presents itself
- ➔ You feel exhausted yet you are having trouble sleeping

When in doubt, don't be afraid to err on the side of rest. Trust yourself to start recognizing these signs as invitations to work in and you will sharpen your intuition and your ability to be more flexible in your approach, which will serve you well in all your pursuits.

We're so busy that we marginalize recovery and keep putting it off, quarantining it to the off-season or rest days rather than prioritizing and normalizing it as a critical daily occurrence. So it shouldn't be a surprise that even when you do have the opportunity to rest, relaxation can feel elusive. If tension lingers long after your workout is over, or if you find yourself lying awake at night with your mind abuzz, you're well aware of this all-too-common scenario. You have to intentionally calm your nervous system in order to shift from effort to ease—from SNS engagement to PNS response. Use your nervous system to full advantage to optimize your recovery. Now more than ever, optimal recovery requires tangible skills, practice, and diligence—it requires you to work in.

When I Do Stop, What Should I Do?

Once you learn to listen to your body, how do you effectively transition from working out to not working out in order to make the best use of downtime and rest days? How do you ensure productive recovery? How do you recover for real? Working in equips you with two key skill sets to accomplish this:

1

MENTAL FOCUS TRAINING

2

PHYSICAL RELAXATION PRACTICE

Recovery is personal. And despite any beliefs you have about its place in your training and life, consider the fact that it doesn't have to be confined to evenings or weekends or vacations. It shouldn't be relegated to downtime or your perceived lack thereof. Waiting until you've crossed everything off your to-do list to relax is like running to stand still. In fact, it probably won't ever happen. Don't wait for injury or burnout to force you into recovery mode. Do it now.

GET REAL

So many factors have a significant impact on the recovery process—nutrition, hydration, sleep, and more. Ultimately, it's up to you to understand what your body needs, listen to its cues, and respond accordingly.

Getting clear about where you're at with your restorative input is a great place to start. Then you can begin to chart a tangible plan to work in, in the context of your unique goals.

- How do I value recovery?
- Is my resistance to recovery a choice or a habit?
- How do I feel when I'm not working out? Why is that?
- How will working in help me achieve my goals?

Recover in the time that is available to you.

TRY IT

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

It sounds so obvious, but be honest, when's the last time you let yourself off the hook because you were just too tired to execute your training plan? And then didn't feel bad about it? Or have you ever lowered your expectations for what you hoped to accomplish in a day after waking exhausted from a really poor night's sleep?

This is key for knowing when to slow down and deciding when to stop. Everyone says, "Listen to your body." But do you actually do it? Sometimes you have to push through. But sometimes you have to cut yourself some slack—and, more important, be okay with it! You'll make up for it when you can train more efficiently and effectively because you let your body be the boss.

Don't just talk about
"listening to your body." *Do it.*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Erin Taylor is an international leader in yoga for athletes. Her mission is to help as many athletes as possible use yoga to achieve their goals, and become more balanced and resilient along the way.

It was her own experience of being sidelined by injury as a collegiate basketball player that first showed her how yoga can be the reset that brings athletes back into balance. Erin founded Jasyoga to equip athletes with powerful skills to prevent injuries and enhance recovery, optimizing performance in sport and life. Over the last decade, she has infused meditation, functional anatomy, and physical therapy techniques into her practice. Now accessible anytime, anywhere via her online video platform and her book **HIT RESET**, Erin's approach has been widely embraced by athletes ranging from recreational to elite, and can be configured to help anyone achieve their goals.



In addition to privately coaching sports teams and athletes, she hosts yoga-for-athletes certification programs and writes a popular blog at jasyoga.com/blog. She lives in London with her husband and daughter.

WINNING DEMANDS REAL RECOVERY



You can't get the full reward from every workout if you cheat on recovery. But most athletes are so focused on working out that they fail to **WORK IN**. Discover the difference that real recovery makes.

Hard training places huge demands on your nervous system, creating physical and mental tension that carries on long after the workout is over. Coach Erin Taylor trains you to work in, strengthening your mental focus and expanding your capacity for physical relaxation, which puts your mind and body back into neutral. Once you know how to shift gears, you can effectively recharge for every challenge you face in both sports and life.

You can recover in 5 minutes a day if you approach working in with the same commitment and determination that you bring to training. It pays off—daily recovery makes you a better athlete because it improves your capacity to focus; helps you manage physical pain, anxiety, and depression; boosts your immune system; and promotes better sleep.

With this 4-week plan for working in, you can learn how to let go of your physical and mental stress and find flow, moving from effort to ease, workout to recovery.

ERIN TAYLOR is the founder of Jasyoga and author of *Hit Reset: Revolutionary Yoga for Athletes*. She is on a mission to help athletes use yoga to accomplish their goals.