A PRACTICAL RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

The First 72 Hours.

A practical guide to recovery after demanding training.



Four flexible recovery windows. Practical guidance on refuelling, fatigue, soreness and deciding what to do next.

01	02	03	04
STABILISE	RESTORE	REBUILD	REASSESS

Recovery is individual. Use the timeline as a guide, not a deadline.

THE PRINCIPLE

Recovery does not follow a stopwatch.

Use 72 hours to organise your decisions, not to decide when recovery must be complete.

01 **00-06 HOURS**
Stabilise
Finish training. Begin replacing fluids and energy. Avoid unnecessary additional load.

02 **06-24 HOURS**
Restore
Prioritise sleep, meals, hydration and any comfortable activity.

03 **24-48 HOURS**
Rebuild
Monitor soreness and fatigue. Adjust activity to your current response.

04 **48-72 HOURS**
Reassess
Consider the demands of the next session. Proceed, modify or defer.

WHAT CHANGES THE TIMELINE?

Training type, intensity, fitness, sleep, nutrition, life stress and any symptoms can all influence how soon you feel ready again.

Safety first. This guide concerns ordinary post-exercise fatigue and soreness. New injury, worsening pain or marked functional limitation deserves assessment. Severe muscle pain or weakness with dark tea- or cola-coloured urine after exercise needs urgent medical attention. [8]

01 / STABILISE

0-6 HOURS

Stabilise.

Finish the session, begin recovery and prepare for rest.

0-6 hours **Stabilise** | 6-24 hours **Restore** | 24-48 hours **Rebuild** | 48-72 hours **Reassess**

HYDRATE

Replace fluid losses

Start replacing the fluids you have lost. Water and your usual meals may be enough; sodium is more relevant after long, hot or very sweaty sessions. [2]

REFUEL

Eat a useful meal

Include protein and carbohydrate. How soon you need to eat depends partly on your last meal and how quickly you must train again. [2]

MANAGE LOAD

Avoid extra demands

Do not stack another demanding session simply because you still feel energetic. Comfortable walking is optional.

PREPARE FOR REST

Protect the basics

Make time for food, a good sleep opportunity and a realistic plan for the next training day. [1]

ASK YOURSELF

What did today's session demand most from me, and what do I need before I train again?

Research: [1] Sleep / [2] Nutrition & hydration

02 / RESTORE

6-24 HOURS

Restore.

Support recovery through the rest of your day.

0-6 hours
Stabilise

6-24 hours
Restore

24-48 hours
Rebuild

48-72 hours
Reassess

SLEEP

Prioritise the opportunity

Maintain a regular routine and leave enough time for a full night of sleep. Individual sleep needs vary. [1]

NUTRITION

Continue refuelling

Eat adequately across the day. Include protein-rich foods and sufficient carbohydrate for your training demands. [2]

ACTIVITY

Keep it comfortable

Walking, easy cycling or gentle mobility may feel good. Complete rest is also reasonable when particularly fatigued.

MONITOR

Notice the response

Fatigue and soreness can develop over the next hours. Worsening or unusual symptoms should not be dismissed as DOMS.

ASK YOURSELF

Am I allowing enough time to recover, or am I adding demands before the next session?

Research: [1] Sleep / [2] Nutrition & hydration

03 / REBUILD

24-48 HOURS

Rebuild.

Adjust the activity to how you are responding.

0-6 hours	6-24 hours	24-48 hours	48-72 hours
Stabilise	**Restore**	**Rebuild**	**Reassess**

01 SYMPTOMS

Check soreness and function

Is soreness mild, moderate or significant for you? Can you perform normal daily tasks comfortably?

02 ACTIVITY

Choose an appropriate option

Easy activity, mobility or modified training may be suitable. Do not force your way through significant discomfort.

03 TRAINING

Adjust the next load

If fatigue or soreness affects control or tolerance, consider reducing intensity, volume or complexity.

FOUNDATIONS

Continue the essentials

Keep up adequate food, fluids and sleep. Recovery devices remain optional, not a substitute. [1-3]

ASK YOURSELF

Would today's planned session support my training goal, or would modifying it be the better decision?

Research: [1] Sleep / [2] Nutrition & hydration / [3] Recovery techniques

04 / REASSESS

48-72 HOURS

Reassess.

Match your present tolerance
to your next training demands.

0-6 hours	6-24 hours	24-48 hours	48-72 hours
Stabilise	**Restore**	**Rebuild**	**Reassess**

YOUR FIVE INDICATORS

01 **Soreness**
Reducing, stable or worsening?

02 **Energy**
Reasonably recovered or unusually tired?

03 **Sleep**
Adequate opportunities for rest?

04 **Function**
Comfortable, controlled movements?

05 **Next session**
Light, heavy or high-intensity demands?

MAKE YOUR DECISION

Proceed

You feel reasonably recovered and tolerate your warm-up.

Modify

Reduce load, volume or intensity when tolerance is lower.

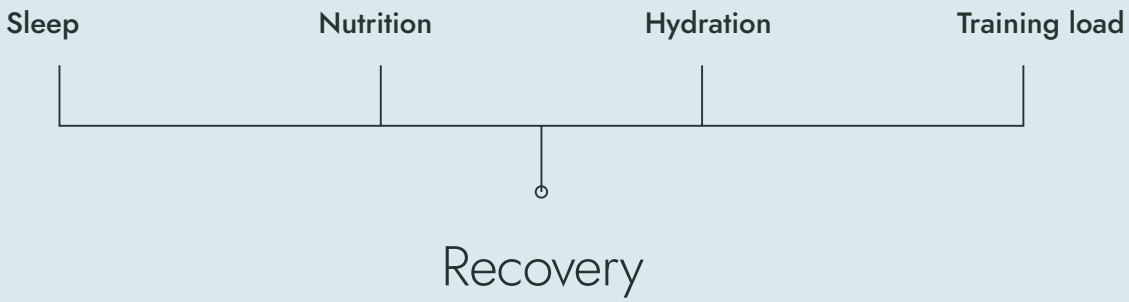
Defer

Avoid pushing through unusual or worsening symptoms.

FOUR FOUNDATIONS

What actually supports recovery?

Before buying extra recovery products, make these priorities routine.



01 / SLEEP

Protect the opportunity

Consistent, sufficient sleep supports health and performance. Try a regular schedule and reduce avoidable disruption. [1]

02 / NUTRITION

Replace and adapt

Adequate energy matters. Protein supports repair and adaptation, while carbohydrate replenishes glycogen. [2]

03 / HYDRATION

Replace fluid losses

Needs differ with sweat, duration and heat. After heavy sweating, sodium may be useful; avoid forcing excess water. [2]

04 / TRAINING LOAD

Plan the next demand

Review intensity, volume and time between sessions. Adjust the next workout when fatigue affects your tolerance.

THE MAIN IDEA

No single device replaces adequate sleep, food, fluids and appropriate training decisions.

WHAT TOOLS CAN OFFER

Useful additions. Not essential solutions.

Feeling better after an intervention does not necessarily mean tissue has repaired faster.

Technique	Potential role	Limits & cautions
Massage & Percussion	May ease perceived soreness or discomfort for some people.	Evidence for faster tissue repair or restored performance is less certain. Avoid aggressive treatment of unusually painful areas. [3]
Compression	Some find garments or boots comfortable.	Studies show inconsistent strength and performance recovery benefits. Avoid use over unexplained swelling without medical advice. [6]
Cold-Water Immersion	May reduce soreness and support some short-term recovery goals.	Frequent use immediately after resistance training may modestly attenuate hypertrophy gains. [5]
Stretching & Mobility	Comfortable movement may help you feel less stiff.	Stretching has not shown clinically meaningful prevention of DOMS. [4]
Red-Light & Other Devices	Research is evolving, and findings vary with devices and treatment protocols.	Do not assume a consumer product reproduces trial outcomes. [7]

Choose a technique for a clear reason. If it adds cost or stress without meaningful benefit, you do not need it.

THE CHECKLIST

Recover with intention.

Use this after demanding exercise. Tick what is relevant; the windows are not compulsory deadlines.

Date _____ Session _____

00-06 HOURS / STABILISE

- [ ] Consider today's training demands
- [ ] Start replacing sweat losses
- [ ] Plan a suitable meal or snack
- [ ] Avoid unnecessary extra load

06-24 HOURS / RESTORE

- [ ] Allow enough opportunity for sleep
- [ ] Eat sufficiently for activity demands
- [ ] Notice soreness or unusual symptoms
- [ ] Keep any activity comfortable

24-48 HOURS / REBUILD

- [ ] Notice soreness and fatigue trends
- [ ] Check everyday activity tolerance
- [ ] Review next session demands
- [ ] Be prepared to modify training

BEFORE YOUR NEXT SESSION

- [ ] Review soreness and energy
- [ ] Consider recent sleep
- [ ] Check comfortable function
- [ ] Match demands to tolerance

WHAT TO DO NEXT

- [ ] Proceed
- [ ] Modify
- [ ] Defer

MY NEXT SESSION

A FINAL THOUGHT

Recovery is individual.

The 72-hour framework is a starting point, not a guarantee. Support recovery and let your response guide the next decision.

SELECTED RESEARCH AND GUIDANCE

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doi:10.1016/j.jand.2015.12.006

03 **Dupuy O, Douzi W, Theurot D, Bosquet L, Dugué B. (2018).** An Evidence-Based Approach for Choosing Post-exercise Recovery Techniques to Reduce Markers of Muscle Damage, Soreness, Fatigue, and Inflammation: A Systematic Review With Meta-Analysis. Front Physiol. 9:403.
doi:10.3389/fphys.2018.00403

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doi:10.1007/s40279-022-01681-4

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ABOUT ASCENSION

Ascension Sports Therapy is a London-based, independent practice providing clinical assessment, hands-on treatment, injury rehabilitation and performance support.

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Educational resource for adults. This guide does not replace individual medical advice, assessment or treatment.