

Year-Round Riding for Greater Fitness and Health

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Road Bike Rider

<https://goo.gl/E3rb2S>



[By Coach John Hughes](#)

I'm starting an eBook on how to slow down the inevitable aging process and to stay fit as long as possible. I've interviewed 10 masters riders ranging in age from 66 to 82. They all share one characteristic – they exercise year-round, primarily riding. No, they don't live in areas with warm winters: 5 live in Colorado, 1 in Idaho, 1 in Massachusetts and 1 in British Columbia!

If you want to improve as a cyclist, your #1 resolution should be to exercise consistently. If you want to live a long and healthy life, your #1 resolution should be to exercise consistently. If you want to reduce stress and get more enjoyment out of life, your #1 resolution should be to exercise consistently.

5 Days a Week for at Least 30 Minutes is Key

Your aerobic endurance is the foundation of all of your cycling. Whether you enjoy health and fitness rides, club rides, touring, centuries or racing, you need good endurance, which is developed by riding lots of hours at the classic *Long Slow Distance* or conversational pace.

Further, if you exercise *regularly and consistently*, then you can significantly slow the aging process of the cardiovascular system. The American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) recommends that adults get *at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic*

exercise five days a week, year-round to reduce the risk of the big three killers: cardiovascular disease, stroke and Type II diabetes. Regular exercise also helps to manage your weight, which helps reduce the risk of these diseases. Regular exercise also has psychological benefits, reducing stress and anxiety and relieving depression.

Note that the goal is at least *5 days* of exercise, with each day totaling *at least 30 minutes* — not at least 150 minutes a week. ***You get much greater health and fitness benefits from multiple relatively short rides a week than from one long ride.***

Base Endurance Exercise

Two issues ago in my column titled [Is It Necessary to Build an Aerobic Base?](#) I described the seven physiological changes that result *only* from endurance training. These adaptations don't take place when you train harder. To review briefly:

Endurance training improves:

1. The endurance of the cycling muscles.
2. The respiratory system, providing more oxygen to the blood supply.
3. The efficiency of the heart so it can pump more blood to the muscles.
4. The capacity of the liver and muscles to store carbohydrates.
5. The neuromuscular efficiency of pedaling.
6. The capacity to burn fat during long rides.
7. The ability to dissipate heat by increasing the blood flow to the skin.

But What About Intensity?

Some coaches recommend high-intensity training as the fastest way to build fitness. However, endurance training brings about the metabolic changes listed above, which don't happen with high intensity training. Without building a proper base first, you risk over-use injuries with hard workouts.

Further, two large-scale recent studies of runners suggest a couple of different things: First – as you would expect – that those who *exercise regularly* live longer

than people who do not exercise. However, runners who consistently *train hard* don't live as long!

For these reasons, your base training should be done at relatively low intensity. You should be able to carry on a conversation the whole time. Here are three methods to gauge the intensity:

- **Rate of Perceived Exertion** of 2-3, where 1 is a very slow walk and 10 is a flat out sprint for a few seconds.
- **Heart rate** of 69 - 83% of Lactate Threshold
- **Power** of 56 - 75% of Functional Threshold Power

How to Ride Year-Round

You are convinced of the benefits of cycling year-round, and then you look out the window or glance at a weather report – and see that's it is some sort of nasty. Here are some tips on how to ride even in the potentially inclement weather of winter:

Stay warm—dress in layers with a wicking layer next to your skin to wick the sweat away so you don't get damp and chill. You can also adjust the layers as the temperature changes. In the November 2 issue of the **RBR Newsletter Coach David Ertl** discussed [What to Wear Across a Range of Weather](#) and **Elizabeth Wicks** described how to [Dial In Clothing Choices for Enjoyable Winter Riding](#).

Eat and drink enough—the ACSM recommends consuming *every hour* 0.3 gm of carbohydrate per pound of body weight (0.7 g per kg)—you may need more in the winter because you are also using fuel to stay warm. You are probably sweating less, but still need fluid. Drink to satisfy your thirst. Before Thanksgiving I wrote about [Tips for Eating and Drinking During Winter Rides](#)

Pace yourself—you are riding for fitness and fun! If you ride at a moderate aerobic pace you'll improve your endurance, and if you eat and drink enough you'll have the fuel to finish the ride. Also, you won't sweat heavily, which could lead to chilling.

Stop to warm up—make the ride more enjoyable with a stop or two for a hot drink and lunch.

Split up your ride—if it's too cold for a longer ride, do a shorter one in the morning and then another shorter one in the afternoon. Or an outdoor ride in the morning and then a trainer ride in the afternoon. The training benefits are similar to a longer ride, although the benefits aren't as great.

Ride loops—If you want to do a two-hour ride, then do 4 half-hour loops so that you're never more than 15 minutes away from home!

Cross-train—the ACSM recommends five days of *aerobic exercise*. Cross-training adds variety and is more fun than slogging through long miles in crummy weather. However, you're a roadie and should still ride three days a week for at least 30 minutes per ride to maintain the cycling-specific use of your muscles.

Ride with buddies—making a riding date with a friend or friends is one of the best ways to ensure you get out of the house on cold days.

Set a goal—setting a goal and tracking your progress is another good way to motivate yourself to ride in the winter. Your goal could be to meet the ACSM's recommendation: ride 5 days a week for at least 30 minutes / day. Or to ride at least 200 miles / month this winter.

Watch for hypothermia—wind chill is one of the main causes of hypothermia, when your body loses heat faster than it can produce heat and your core temperature starts to fall. Most cases of hypothermia occur when the temperature is around 40F (4C) and it's unexpectedly rainy and/or windy. Hypothermia begins with shivering and, as your core temperature continues to drop, then your heart, nervous system and other organs don't work properly. If you lose fine motor control (for example, you can't use your fingers to manipulate a zipper) or if you start to stagger, you are developing severe hypothermia and *must get out of the cold*.

For more information see my [Winter Cycling Bundle](#).