

Do You Need A Break From The Trainer?

January 7, 2022

By Molly Hurford



For most of us, getting outside and riding isn't an option in Ontario during the winter—though if you can try fat biking, we highly recommend it! However, there are plenty of cyclist-friendly outdoor activities you can do for cross-training, like snowshoeing or cross-country skiing. And even other indoor workout options, like yoga or strength training, can provide a much-needed break from riding a trainer every day. Not sure if you're in need of a pause on trainer time? Here are five signs that you should log off Zwift and take a break from the trainer.

1: You can't remember the last workout you did outside

Winters in Ontario—especially right now, with lockdowns, remote work and remote schooling—make getting outside difficult. In fact, it's not uncommon to go days without even stepping foot outside, especially if all of your training is done on the indoor trainer. But, getting outside for some of our workouts, even if it's just for a brisk walk, makes a big difference to our overall health and well-being. We don't just need exercise and movement, our bodies crave nature and sun exposure. And with sunlight in extremely limited supply during winters here, it's easy to go days without getting any real sunlight on your skin. So, if you can't remember the last time you went outside and spent time in nature, it might be time to take a trainer break and get outdoors, even if that means bundling up and doing a less intense workout. (And we definitely understand that not everyone has access to fat biking, snowshoeing or skiing in the winter, but even those who live in cities or areas without those amenities can still benefit from just getting outside for a walk!)

2: You're developing any kind of skin issues

Saddle sores are sadly quite common when you spend a lot of hours on the trainer, because unlike riding outside, you are less likely to move around on the bike, standing, hovering, or even just shifting in the saddle. And even the best fan setup is rarely aerating your nether regions as well as a good breeze outside will, so you're likely a bit sweattier than usual down there. And you may not be wearing your bib shorts correctly (i.e. you're wearing them with the straps down) which can lead to them moving around in ways that cause more chafing. This can all lead to saddle sores or even just heat rash on your thighs and butt, or even chest and back if you don't have a good fan setup. The best way to deal with skin issues is to take a few days off to let your skin recover.

3: You haven't taken a rest week in... wait, have you ever taken a rest week

Indoor trainers have made year-round training easier, which sounds great in theory. But it can also be a big problem, since that means it's easy to skip an off-season or recovery time entirely. Think about 20 years ago: In the winter, you likely took a break from the bike in order to spend time outside skiing or hiking, or perhaps doing some strength training. Sure, some people had trainers back in the eighties and nineties (as the child of an early-1980s triathlete, I remember one of the first-ever stationary trainers proudly taking up half of our laundry room when I was six years old!), but rarely were they used on a daily basis. More often, they were part of a workout plan that would have a bit of pedaling, maybe some rowing, and some strength training. Today, you never have to miss a bike workout thanks to indoor trainers, but despite that fact, it is important to prioritize rest and recovery. So if you can't remember the last time you took a few days off, it might be time to unplug the trainer for a bit.

5: If you dread the idea of getting on the trainer

Finding yourself bribing, cajoling, threatening or compromising with yourself in order to get onto the trainer? If the idea of putting in time on the trainer is less and less appealing every day, that's usually a sign that you've pushed yourself too hard or too far, and often, a few days away can work wonders. You know the expression, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder?' That applies to trainer time! Take a few days off from riding the trainer and you will almost certainly notice that rather than dreading the walk down the basement stairs, you are actually looking forward to your next session. Focus on strength and mobility if you don't feel like you truly need time off, but change up your stimulus! (A word of wisdom: Don't jump back on at the first sign of missing it. Give yourself an extra day to really let that motivation grow, until you're ecstatic to get back to your next Zwift group ride.)

About the Author

Molly Hurford is a journalist in love with all things cycling, running, nutrition and movement-related. When not outside, she's writing about being outside and healthy habits of athletes and interviewing world-class athletes and scientists for The Consummate Athlete podcast and website, and most recently launched the book 'Becoming A Consummate Athlete.' She's the author of multiple books including the Shred Girls, a young adult fiction series and online community focused on getting girls excited about bikes. Molly is a little obsessed with getting people psyched on adventure and being outside, and she regularly hosts talks and runs clinics for cyclists and teaches yoga online and IRL... And in her spare time, the former Ironman triathlete now spends time tackling long runs and rides on trails or can be found out hiking with her mini-dachshund DW and husband, cycling coach and kinesiologist Peter Glassford.