

Illness

Prevention: do the basics well

- 1) Nutrition, sleep and hydration are the three most important lifestyle considerations if you want to avoid illness. There will be follow up guidelines on these but if you are doing these three things well then it is likely that you will avoid most illnesses and you will also be less likely to get injured.
- 2) Avoid unhygienic places and people! Cleanliness is key and while we don't want to trigger a lot of cases of OCD, you must be extra vigilant about hand washing, hygiene around cooking and food storage, cleanliness of living space and trying not to spend time with people who are ill or who live unhygienically. Always carry alcohol rub with you and use it particularly in the gym/on public transport/before and after eating/after an outing/at a time when you've had to handle something dirty, such as pick something up from the floor that you've dropped. All clubs and homes should have antiseptic hand wash available at all times.
- 3) Bottled water is preferable to tap, especially if you are somewhere you cannot confidently trust water from the mains, such as on training camp or at a foreign regatta.
- 4) Keep daily monitoring of your health and well-being so you can act the moment you are alerted that there might be something wrong and you can stop a small problem from becoming a big problem.

Immediate action

- 1) As soon as you think you might be ill, especially if your morning monitoring is telling you that something isn't right, tell your coach and stop or modify training accordingly. If it's something reasonably acute, like vomiting, violent coughing or flu-like symptoms, you should go to your GP. You should not train until you know exactly what it wrong or are confident that you are well on the road to recovery. You should also avoid other rowers so you don't spread something. With most illnesses, you are most contagious before you know you are ill and during the worst, early symptoms. If you just have a light head cold (runny nose/sneezing etc) but no cough or achy limbs then it's usually okay to do conservative, steady aerobic training. Anything harder might kick up a more serious reaction. Anything more serious, like a chesty cough or achy limbs means no training. Usually with illness you will see an elevated heart rate – a sign that your body is fighting a virus or an infection. If your heart rate is more than five beats higher than usual then you should be very wary of pushing yourself. More than ten beats is almost certainly a sign that you shouldn't train until it's dropped significantly. Occasionally, with a virus or if this is how you present as an individual, you may find that your heart rate drops and feels like a heavy thud in your chest rather than your usual rhythm. If this happens the course of action is the same...keep monitoring and don't return to hard training until this phenomenon has stopped.

Coming back to training

Once your morning monitoring, your perception of how you feel and all other symptoms start to recede, you can start back to training. You **MUST** start back conservatively and not expect to jump

straight back into the intensity of volume that you were at before. The longer and more severe the illness you have had, the more gently you should return to training. The general guidelines are:

- Train on heart rate, not split (avoiding the ergo is a good idea unless you're really disciplined because you'll chase a split too soon).
- You need to do a good few weeks of gentle aerobic training before trying to push onto U1. Intensity will make you fall over really hard if you're still on the road back, you need to keep a lid on the effort levels.
- Monitoring your morning markers is absolutely key and anything sinister should show up in these in conjunction with how you feel. Any adverse reaction during this return to training, e.g. a recurring sore throat, a change in the presentation of your morning heart rate or a lack of enthusiasm for training would suggest you're not quite ready to start pushing yet and the process of keeping track of the morning monitoring will highlight these things to you.
- DON'T worry about the next trial/race/test as stress and anxiety will compromise your health further. You'll come back quicker if you stay relaxed and listen to your body.
- If you make a change, ie increase training heart rate or length of session, make sure you give it a few days (preferably a week) before changing anything else. Only ever change one thing at a time.

If you've had a 24-hour stomach upset/vomiting bug and you've dropped significant weight, one basic rule is to not come back to training until 24 hours after you've started eating normally again, and don't train hard until your weight had returned to your pre-illness level. If your stomach problem has gone on longer than a short sickness, you may find it harder to return to your original weight as your body composition may have changed. If this is the case, as long as you are eating a healthy diet and have no negative side effects you can train as normal.

Being sick doesn't mean you can't move on as an athlete. You can still do core stability, stretching, technical work and weights (the latter if you are not very sick but need to stay away from aerobic training). But don't go down your club and spread the illness if you are still in the contagious stage!

If you regularly get ill then it is very likely that there is an aspect of your life that your body is struggling with. This may be stress, lack of sleep, inadequate nutrition, regular dehydration, lack of rest time or poor sleep patterns, of all of the above. You need to analyse where you might be going wrong and make some permanent changes to your lifestyle and behaviours if you are struggling with illness all winter.

WARNING: if you have had a significant period of more than a few days when you have not been able to do any training your body will get a bit 'soft' and some of your supporting structures will switch off. It's not unusual for athletes to come back to training after a long break and get injured very quickly. To avoid this make sure you 'switch on' with activation work and lighter weights to begin with until you feel that you're robust again.

Summary

- Keep a daily morning monitoring record
- Stop training immediately if something is wrong and tell your coach so they can help you manage the illness
- Go to a GP or specialist if it's more sinister than a head cold or minor stomach upset
- Keep monitoring yourself during your illness and recovery

- Come back to training patiently and intelligently
- Analyse your life in its entirety if you are getting ill regularly and identify problem areas, then make changes