

# THE TRAINING PLAN

Your guide to preparing for  
a successful Open

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## SLEEP

### How can sleeping well help you be a better athlete?

A good night's sleep is essential for your body and brain to recover and adapt. During sleep, you replenish neurotransmitters and energy sources, repair tissues, renew your immune system, release growth-hormone. You also go through various other processes that help you feel rested and ready for the day.

Insufficient sleep (quality or quantity) means reduced brain, physical and immune functions. These lead to poor performance, reduced ability to adapt to training and long-term health risks.

Quite simply, improving your sleep is one of the very best ways to become a better (and healthier) athlete. The following pages will help you get set with the basics for better sleep.

### How much sleep should I get?

Most adults would benefit from 7 - 8.5 hrs of sleep a night (most = you, unless you have a very rare genetic variant DEC2.).

Some research (together with anecdotal evidence) indicates that sleeping up to 10hrs can lead to further increase in sports performance.

## ACTION STEP

### Track your sleep

#### “What gets measured, gets managed”

Many of us think we are sleeping more or better than we actually are. Tracking your sleep will give you a realistic baseline and allows you to measure progress while correlating your sleep with your performance. There are many solutions out there for sleep tracking. To get started, here are two simple options:

#### 1. Paper journal

Have a notebook by your bed. In the evening, write down the time you went to bed. Most of us take some time to fall asleep. To start off, take 30 minutes off your sleep time when calculating your nightly total. (You can adjust this to your personal falling asleep time later). In the morning, write down the time you woke up. For additional value, add a note about how you felt (tired, ok, well-rested, energetic).

#### 2. Sleep cycle app

A simple way to keep track of your sleep. Together with sleep notes, you can see how different behaviours affect your sleep quality. It's a crude measurement compared to some other technologies available, but it's an easy, hassle-free starting point for your tracking. Remember to turn your phone on airplane mode for this.

## Sleep cycles

Note how many hours you sleep on average per night and how many 90-minute sleep cycles you get each night (e.g., 7.5 hours of sleep = 5 x 90-minute sleep cycles). The length of the sleep cycle is not precisely 90-minutes for everyone, but this is a useful way to think about it as you tweak to find your routine.

If you wake up in the middle of a sleep cycle, you might feel “groggy” and have a hard time getting out of bed. Waking up at the end of a cycle might help you feel more fresh, even if you’re not getting as many hours of sleep as you’d like.

### **ACTION STEP**

**Aim to sleep in complete, 90-minute sleep cycles for a week.**

For most people, 7.5-hours (5 sleep cycles) can be realistic. You can take it up a notch by going for 9-hours (6 sleep cycles).

## But I’m too busy to sleep more.

We get it, you have lots going on. But if you don’t start to sleep more, you’ll have a lot ‘less’ going on in no time. In all seriousness, we know that it can be hard to change your sleep schedule and habits. Start where you can start, even small improvements can lead to big results when done consistently.

## Maybe you can nap?

When you're training hard or had a reduced night's sleep, a nap can restore your mental and physical ability to perform. Keep your naps between 10 to 20 minutes or 90 minutes (full sleep cycle) for best results. If you have a hard time falling asleep at night, avoid napping and see the other tips to help you sleep better (following pages).

## **ACTION STEP**

### **Improve your sleep routine**

**Avoid light (especially blue light) at least an hour (ideally from sunset) before going to bed.**

Blue light reduces melatonin secretion, making it harder to fall asleep and reduces your sleep quality;

- Wear orange or pink glasses if watching TV late at night
- Turn on "night shift" on your phone and use F.lux to adjust your computer screen to softer wavelengths.
- Do not watch TV or use your phone/tablet in bed

**Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake.**

Alcohol reduces your sleep quality significantly and can lead you to wake up at night for bathroom breaks. Caffeine has a long half-life in your body; limit your intake to a few cups a day, ideally 2+ hrs apart and stop consuming coffee around noon or early afternoon.

**Have a regular bedtime schedule.**

Having the discipline to keep your bedtime within a 30 minute window from day to day (including weekends) allows for a steady diurnal (daily) rhythm, leading to higher quality sleep and easier time falling asleep. Do the best you can.

Use an app like Headspace or Calm for meditation, or use white noise, calming music or sleep stories.

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### **I STILL find it hard to get to sleep or stay asleep.**

Keeping your bedroom as a 'sacred space' where it is used ONLY for sleeping (and sex), is an important habit to establish. There are multiple ways that you can improve your bedroom's potential to help you get better quality sleep. These range from very simple (no phones) to fairly expensive (investing in a new bed). Start with the most achievable interventions and build from there as you can.

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## **Design your bedroom for optimal sleep.**

- Sleep in a cool temperature.**  
A cool temperature (15 - 19°C / 60 - 67°F) makes it easier to fall asleep and improves your sleep quality.
- Sleep in as dark a room as possible (pitch black is ideal).**  
Exposure to light reduces melatonin and increases cortisol secretion, leading to increased alertness (difficulty falling asleep), poor sleep quality and poor recovery at night. Black-out curtains are an investment you won't regret.
- No electronics in your bedroom.**  
Unplug any electronics with lights, turn your phone on "airplane" mode and keep the TV in the living room.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress (with a great pillow).**  
One of the best investments you can make (consider how many hours a day you spend on your bed). This is important enough that Tour de France cyclist Bradley Wiggins travelled with his own bed and pillows during the whole of 2012 Tour (which he won). Do your research and find the ideal sleeping surface for you.
- Wash your sheets, duvet and pillow covers (at high temperature) weekly.**  
You don't want to be sleeping with dust mites, do you?

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We hope you found at least one actionable idea in this short manual. There is no better way to help improve your training and performance than consistently getting a good nights sleep (eating well comes close).

Any and every small step you can (and will) take to sleep better is going to pay you back a thousand times over. Don't worry about having a perfect practice now. Find a routine that you can keep up for long-term and that supports your training. Take all the opportunities you get for more sleep and improve your sleep environment progressively.

Sweet dreams...