

NSAID's and recovery

Age, nutrition, sleep, stress and inactivity can all affect muscle tissue healing. Inflammation is essential to healing because it helps to expand capillaries and bring extra oxygen and nutrients to the area. Icing can be an effective way of controlling the inflammation and helping speed up the healing process. Icing an injured area slows metabolic activity, numbs nerve endings and constricts capillaries. Once the ice is removed and the area warms, capillaries open up and flood the area with blood and nutrients. It is recommended to ice for 20 minutes every other hour. You need to allow the area to come back to temp in order to get the benefits. As Kelly Starrett would say “More time icing isn't better more often is”. Ice is good for normal wear and tear and chronic overuse or tissue fatigue injuries.

Another good technique is contrast hydrotherapy. Contrast hydrotherapy involves alternately heating and cooling a body part, or even the whole body. It is a powerful way to soothe and stimulate irritated or healing tissue without overstimulating it, and at least some amount of contrasting should be a standard part of rehab from most fitness training. Contrast hydrotherapy is a good way to speed up recovery. You perform it by getting in hot water for 3-6 minutes then immediately getting into cold water for 30-60 seconds. Repeat this cycle 3-5 times and be sure to always end with cold water. You can do it in the shower but a more effective way is with a hot tub at 104 degrees and bath tub filled with ice water.

NSAID's are a bad choice for recovery and pain management. NSAID's (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) work by inhibiting the enzyme cyclooxygenase, which converts arachidonic acid to prostaglandin, in turn, is converted by other enzymes to several other prostaglandins. Prostaglandins are mediators of pain and inflammation. They act as messenger molecules in the process of inflammation. Arachidonic acid is necessary for the repair and growth of skeletal muscle tissue. It is the regulator of localized muscle inflammation and may be the central nutrient controlling the intensity of the anabolic tissue rebuilding response to weight training. By taking ibuprofen or other NSAID's you are stopping your body's natural process of healing. They prevent you from feeling pain at the cost of healing. The pain is necessary to let you know to take it easy and let the body do its job.

Most crossfitters are accustomed to daily muscle soreness. Icing after workouts and or contrast hydrotherapy will help recovery and allow you to keep up your intensity. Don't hide the pain by taking NSAID's. Recovery is a holistic multifaceted process so be sure to get 8-10 hours of sleep per night in complete darkness, eat a paleo/ zone favorable diet, manage stress and add contrast hydrotherapy post workout.