

## **SICKNESS AND TRAINING**

### **WHAT SHOULD THE PARENT, COACH, AND SWIMMER DO?**

\*Based on selected extracts from the article: Boehler, A. E. (May, 1999) Exercise: in sickness & health?

Regular swimming training can contribute to the health of an individual. However, when a swimmer is ill, or has symptoms that are precursors of disease, the question of training or not arises. What are the best responses to common situations? The following are prudent reactions.

A swimmer wakes up sneezing, coughing, and generally feeling lousy. The alarm has sounded and the swimmer registers that it is not a good idea to rise and go and train. However, the guilt of missing practice, and incurring varying stages of wrath from a coach, usually forces the athlete to go through the motions of training. Is that a good choice?

Illness and/or disease stress the body and the immune system. Extensive exercise also stresses the body. Too much stress negatively affects the body and its systems. It can generally be concluded that no benefit accrues from training when stress is excessive. That tenet should be the basis of coaching decisions when illness is involved. Indeed, too much swimming training decreases the protection of the immune system and consequently, illness occurs because of that increased susceptibility to disease. To train further is dangerous.

#### **Do not be afraid to rest**

Many swimming people believe that if a swimmer misses a training session that swimmer's career, or immediate future performances, are irreparably harmed.

Missing a session when the body is not able to derive benefit from any training is not a liability. Missing a week to recover from an illness is not likely to affect swimming performance in any drastic way. If a disease was exacerbated by excessive exercise stress, that is training continued while ill, an absence would actually benefit performance.

#### **Swimming when feeling unwell**

While regular exercise can actually boost immunity, exercising when ill will not help an athlete get better any faster. Therefore, the preferred alternative is to miss training and get rid of a short-term illness. Any urge in the athlete or urging from a parent or coach to train harder when "mildly ill" has no benefit and can even make the athlete sicker.

If an athlete has recently emerging symptoms of achiness, extreme fatigue, fever, vomiting, diarrhoea, severe sore throat, or anything else that is flu-like the best alternative is to miss training.

#### **Swimming when sick**

If a swimmer has symptoms that are infectious, for example the 'flu', exercising can produce complications, which lowers immunity further. To train under such a state of ill-health threatens the athlete's health further and also raises the possibility of spreading the disease, something which should be avoided in sporting environments. If an athlete has symptoms of coughing, any illness involving the chest and lungs (e.g., bronchitis), or an infection, then passive rest rather than training exercise is warranted.

#### **Closure**

The discussion above is purely a set of general guidelines.

When returning to training after recovering from illness, despite feeling better than during the period of illness, a swimmer should be gradually reintroduced to exercise. The assumption of heavy training stress immediately upon returning to the pool has the potential to reignite the disease if recovery has not been total. Harder training cannot accelerate recovery and retraining. It will occur depending upon the attributes of the swimmer.

After a child has been ill and returns to the swimming pool for organized training, parents should ask the coach the following:

1. "How long will it be before my child returns to the normal training load and intensity?"
2. "Will you immediately remove my child from the pool if any of the following symptoms occur -----?"

Despite the fact that the swimmer may show a level of commitment and mental toughness, which is admirable, little to no benefit is derived from training while ill.