

# ATAWorld

CREATING TOMORROW'S LEADERS ... ONE BLACK BELT AT A TIME

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## Earning Your **BLACK BELT**

How It Prepares  
You to *Challenge*  
*Everything*











# Rest & Recovery

**Guess what? More downtime each day can improve your Taekwondo.**

by Ingrid Sbacchi Bairstow

**W**e've all experienced those foggy days after sleepless nights when you can't seem to do anything right—when it takes *all* of your concentration to complete even the simplest of tasks. Worse still, sleeplessness (and the fog that follows) can become a chronic problem if you're not giving yourself enough time to rest and recover from the physical, mental and emotional demands of your daily life.



Adam O'Connor, 5th Degree Black Belt and chief instructor at ATA Martial Arts in Arkansas, has worked with his share of overscheduled and overwhelmed students—and many of them are children.

"Today's kids have so much going on that by the time they come to Taekwondo class, they've lost the spark they had earlier in the day," he says. Some students who attend his classes are just too tired, both mentally and physically, to do their best. They're involved in too many outside activities or they're just not getting enough time to rest or relax. "Sleep is essential for athletes, but rest is, too," he explains. "A kid needs rest and relaxation just as much as an adult."

### Insufficient Sleep

O'Connor is right about the importance of sleep. The National Sleep Foundation (NSF), a non-profit that studies the effects of sleep and sleep deprivation, found that getting enough sleep is essential not only for health but also for learning new physical skills. According to the NSF, sleep builds "procedural memory," which means that a good night's sleep can help you recall the next move in your form and the proper sequence of your weapons routine.

Getting enough sleep also means that your body continues to learn motor skills—in fact, they're learned while you sleep. Without the rest you need, your body won't do as well remembering the physical techniques you're trying to learn.

ATA Masters and instructors also stress the importance of sleep and rest. "Getting to bed early is vital for children, since the early hours of sleep are especially important as their bodies are developing," says Chief Master G.K. Lee, who strives to get adequate sleep and spend an hour in meditation each day. "Not getting enough sleep affects memory and focus."

But not all children benefit from plenty of snooze time. According to a nationwide poll on the sleeping habits of children and their parents conducted by the NSF in 2004, the average American child gets

less sleep during a 24-hour period than is recommended by sleep experts. School-aged children, for example, average only 9.5 hours of shut-eye per night instead of the 10 to 11 hours recommended.

This bodes badly not only for performance but also for general health, says Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, medical director of the national Fibromyalgia & Fatigue Centers and author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic* (Avery, 2001). Adequate sleep is necessary for a healthy immune system, and it's only when your body is completely at rest that it can repair muscle tissue torn during training. In addition, he says, "Growth hormone is made during deep sleep, which is critical for muscle repair. The younger you are, the more growth hormone and more sleep your body needs."



provide, and at some point, your body needs you to take a break and get some shut-eye. Niblock, who teaches four days a week at her academy, can tell when children in her classes haven't had sufficient sleep the night before. Their techniques are less enthusiastic, she says, and they don't listen as well.

When this happens, Niblock urges parents to help their children maintain a healthy balance in their schedules. "They may need a day off just to play with friends," she says. Balance in training also is important for older students and instructors, Niblock adds. To achieve your goals, you must maintain a certain level and frequency of training, but you also must incorporate enough time for your body to rest and recover.

### Our experts agree:

Plenty of rest, the right amount of training, plus time for play and relaxation all contribute to top performance.

### Time for Play

Like many people, Senior Master Marilyn Niblock leads a busy life. She's a full-time neonatal nurse practitioner, a mother of four and the co-owner of Niblock ATA Black Belt Academy in Round Rock, Texas. Though all of her children are now out of the house, Niblock still goes without sleep during her 24- to 36-hour work shifts and admits that because of this, she has her cranky days. For Niblock, physical activity is a stress reliever; going for a run makes her a nicer person, she says.

Chances are a nap also would work wonders for her outlook. There are limits to the benefits that physical activity can

### On Overtraining

When athletes—children, teens or adults—are constantly dealing with soreness or injuries, they are probably overtraining. While a good workout can leave anyone a bit sore, there's a difference between minor, general soreness and chronic achiness or nagging pain in a specific muscle or joint. The latter is a sign you may be working out too much. Other signs of overtraining include reaction times slowing down, low motivation, feeling lethargic or burnt out, and having a higher resting heart rate.

The only solution to these problems is slowing down, listening to your body



and incorporating more rest, says Niblock, who acknowledges how hard this can be. "There is always ego and adrenaline to contend with," she says. Students, parents and even instructors can be resistant to changes in a workout schedule, since they think it will take too much time away from their training and set them back.

But take heart, says Cory Bank, Ph.D., sports psychologist at The Abington Center for Therapy and Sports Psychology in Glenside, Penn. Most overtraining problems, including some minor recurring injuries, can be addressed by modifying your workout or choosing quality workouts over quantity.

### Getting Back on Track

There are some times, like right before a big testing or around World Championships, when students push themselves to new limits with their training. But Bank has some recommendations for how to give your body a break—without taking a break—to get you back to your peak after rigorous workouts.

"I tell clients to cut back 20 percent of everything in their workout: the intensity, the frequency and the duration," he says. For example, if you normally practice kicking five times a week for an hour, try cutting back to four times a week for 45 minutes, doing fewer repetitions of each kick. Then do something different with your extra time—go for a massage, do some gentle stretching or try yoga.

The path to recovery doesn't mean stopping what you're doing; it just means modifying your training regimen a bit. And by following the "cut back 20 percent" rule, you won't lose strength, which withers faster than it builds.

Cross-training and doing alternative moves can help you work different muscles and give those that have been overworked a break. O'Connor enjoys golf, which allows him to practice his hand-eye coordination, also important in Taekwondo. Niblock encourages walking, swimming or biking, because you are still keeping your body moving and your heart rate up but are not overdoing it while you recover.

*(continued on page 30)*

## Are You Getting Enough **SLEEP?**

Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum, medical director of the national Fibromyalgia & Fatigue Centers and author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic* (Avery, 2001), offers these sleep guidelines:

Age	Amount Needed
1-3	12-14 hrs/day
3-6	10½ -12 hrs/day
7-12	10-11 hrs/day
13-18	8-9½ hrs/day
18+	7-10 hrs/day

To put it in perspective, 100 years ago, the average night's sleep was nine hours. Then we developed light bulbs, radio, TV and computers, and now adults sleep an average of 6.5 hours per night. Too little sleep causes fatigue, pain, obesity, loss of muscle mass and decreased ability to get conditioned. *-I.S.B.*





(continued from page 27)

## Tips for Parents

Parents, watch your children for signs of sleep deprivation, burnout and over-training. The NSF cites these warning signs: difficulty waking in the morning, irritability late in the day, falling asleep spontaneously during quiet times of the day and sleeping for extra-long periods on the weekend. The NSF also points out that irregular sleep schedules, including sleeping in and/or staying up late, can contribute to poor-quality sleep.

To avoid injuries and irritability, aim to keep your child on an age-appropriate sleep schedule (see page 27). And know that adolescents need just as much sleep, if not more than they did during their pre-adolescent years.

Finally, parents, keep an eye on your child's schedule. Remember, he or she

doesn't *have* to do everything. If your child loves Taekwondo but also plays basketball, perhaps there are ways to arrange the schedule so he or she doesn't go from one sport to the next, day after day. It may be fun at first, but burnout is likely to follow.

## Recovering From Injury

While every athlete deals with sore muscles, occasionally injuries are more serious. When that happens, it may be necessary to take a break from training or change what you're doing. In January 2005, Chief Master G.K. Lee was injured filming a black belt DVD. "I was involved in extensive jumping, twisting, kneeling and kicking," he says. "The stress on my knee from over-extending caused a ligament to tear."

After Chief Master Lee had surgery to repair his knee, he was careful not to go back to full-fledged training too soon. But he didn't quit entirely. "I did Ki

training and a lot of steady middle stance and steady one-leg standing, each held for a minimum of three minutes," he says. This helped him maintain muscle tone.

Chief Master Lee eventually made a full recovery. He was even able to test for his 8th Degree Black Belt the following summer and passed with flying colors! His story is a good example of the need for patience in recovery and returning to full training slowly after an injury.

Our experts agree: Plenty of rest, the right amount of training, plus time for play and relaxation all contribute to top performance. "Kids need to be kids," says instructor Adam O'Connor. "Otherwise, they wear themselves out with too many activities." And don't forget: adults need rest and playtime, too! **ATA**

*Ingrid Sbacchi Bairstow is a freelance writer who covers health, nutrition and wellness.*

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# Side Effects of SLEEP DEPRIVATION

—From The National Sleep Foundation

✓ **Impaired motor function**, which can include tremors, lack of coordination, blurred vision and/or prolonged reaction time. Delayed visual and auditory reaction time also can result.

✓ **Reduced cardiovascular performance**, which can mean that your fitness may be down by as much as 11 percent.

✓ **Diminished mental function.** This can occur so that you will not be able to remember the moves you learned in the do-jahng yesterday.

✓ **Increased perceived exertion:** Even if you can perform at similar levels physically, you will

feel tired more quickly and may give up sooner.

✓ **Reduced endurance**, which means that you may get tired sooner because glucose storage is slowed with sleep deprivation.

✓ **Impaired moods:** Sleep deprivation can leave you in a bad mood; you'll certainly not be in the top mental state necessary to win a championship! —I.S.B.

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