

Recovering from the UTA – You need to restock your cookie jar!



Imagine your body is a cookie jar. Life is a constant balancing act of putting cookies in, and taking cookies out. You need your cookie jar to be $\frac{3}{4}$ full most of the time. If it is less than half full you'll be feeling run down, picking up colds and flus, and lacking energy. If your cookie jar is empty, then you're dead!

As an endurance athlete, you need to be extremely good at managing your cookie jar. If you consistently take out more cookies than you put back in, then you will be picking up niggles or injuries, you'll be too tired to train properly, or possibly getting sick with colds and flus.

What empties your cookie jar?

- Training
- Strength training
- Work
- Stress

What fills your cookie jar?

- Sleeping (ideally 7-8 hours / night)
- Eating nutritious / healthy food and avoiding “junk food” as much as possible
- Stretching / Foam rolling
- Icing sore body parts
- Compression clothes
- Sports massage

Having just completed the UTA, your jar will be running low. For the next three to four weeks you should be focusing on putting as many cookies back as you can. This will help your body to recover so that you can ease yourself back into training and potentially race again in the coming months.



A lot of people underestimate the time it takes to recover from endurance events. The longer it took you to complete the UTA, the more cookies you will have taken out of your jar, and therefore the longer it is going to take to recover. If, for example, the UTA took you 20 hours, it will take longer for your body to recover than for someone who took 9 hours.



If over the next 3-4 weeks the alarm clock goes off at 5am for your usual run, and you feel like you'd rather turn over and go back to sleep, then that is what you should do. Better still, turn off your alarm clock and only run if you wake up feeling like it. Gradually your energy levels will return to normal and you will be

looking forward to the morning runs again rather than dreading them.

Have you ever wondered why some people recover quicker than others?

Why can some runners compete in three or four 100km races over the course of a year, while others struggle with only one event?

Unfortunately, some of it is to do with genetics, but a lot of it is to do with the size of your cookie jar, and the good news is - you can change it.

Our bodies adapt gradually to the stress we put them under. If you run regularly, whilst managing your cookies so that you put in slightly more than you take out, then over a long period of time your muscles and tendons get stronger, and your bone density increases. As this process of positive tissue adaptation occurs, our bodies will gradually be able to cope with more and more running volume (growing your cookie jar)

One of the biggest problems today is that people are too impatient for this positive adaptation process to occur, and during their weeks and months of training they (usually accidentally) take out more cookies than they put back in. This might be sustainable for a few days or weeks, but over a longer period of time your cookie jar starts running too low and injuries occur.

If you want to improve your performance for next years UTA then you need to gradually work on increasing the size of your cookie jar.

Ways to increase the size of your cookie jar:

- Train consistently week after week, each week putting in slightly more cookies than you take out.
 - Make sure you incorporate “recovery weeks” every 4 – 5 weeks where you deliberately reduce your running volume to let your body recover and your energy levels increase.
- Improve your strength and stability (with a running-specific type of exercise program)
- Improve your running technique so that you move more efficiently
- Improve your flexibility and mobility (especially around the hips)

You can also help your cookie jar to grow by helping your body recover from training sessions more effectively:

- Eat a nutrient dense healthy diet – the definition of a “healthy diet” isn’t rocket science. Just try to avoid as much processed food as possible
- Get more sleep
- Implement some self-maintenance strategies like stretching and foam rolling
- Get a sports massage when you feel like you need one
- Get any injuries or niggles diagnosed sooner rather than later. You can “run through” some niggles, but not others – so you need to find out what the issue is.
- Reduce your stress levels

HOWEVER, there is plenty of time in the coming weeks and months to start growing your cookie jar.

Your priority right now (and your prize for completing the UTA) in the mean time is restocking your current jar.

