

especially in triathlon, clothing, gadgets and equipment are taken on as a fashion. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that compression garments can be of benefit during and after intense training or competition periods. However, the latest advice is that these garments should only be used after particularly intense sessions or heavy training or competition periods. Outside these times you don't want to reduce the stress on the tissues too much, as it's this stress that drives the changes to make you faster and stronger.

Science or fiction?

The science behind compression clothing comes from the medical profession and the use of compression garments to control or reduce swelling post-operatively or due to circulatory conditions by improving blood flow in non-active, resting hospital patients. From this, medical experts concluded that using similar garments for athletes would reduce swelling and inflammation, and help remove waste products such as lactate and creatine kinase post training.

They can also improve proprioception (body awareness) and reduce the sensation of muscle soreness or Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS). During training itself some studies have shown reduced muscle oscillation, improved circulation, and proprioceptive sense. The variety of results from the research literature is down to the difference in testing procedures, the types of compression used, the outcomes measured, and the methods of assessing these variables. Also, low participant numbers and lack of control groups have led to varying results. Currently, there is a growing consensus in the research that compression clothing can help with recovery, but less support for improved performance in endurance athletes (there is more evidence for improved performance for explosive or heavy resistance activities, and contact sports such as rugby).

So should you try some? Certainly, but check the sizing guides, as fit is the most important factor. At the moment you can only buy 'off the peg' clothing, but the future is to have compression gear tailor-made to your body shape. Different people prefer different brands and styles, so my advice is try different ones and make sure they are comfortable, as you'll wear them from a few hours to overnight.

The take home message is compression clothing is one of many recovery strategies to help the regeneration of normal physiological functions, and is a relatively cheap way of assisting this process. But the basics of sleep, rest, nutrition, and smart training progressions must be applied before looking into any additional recovery aids.

Bike

LONE BIKER?



I'm training for an Ironman this summer and hoping to do the bike leg in about six hours – this should be

achievable based on my previous performances at middle and Olympic distance. I've joined a bike club to help me get in the long rides, as I find them quite boring, but do I need to break out on my own as I get nearer my race? The club rides are at an average 15mph with lots of chatting and the odd cake stop, but we do get 100 miles in. Is this good enough to make me fit for the race?

Daniel Gray, Sheffield

Eamonn Deane

Elite cyclist and coach



While you definitely need to do some longer rides and get miles in to build up your stamina, I recommend that you do break out on your own, as you put it. Long steady rides are the staple diet of cyclists. However, I believe they only get you fit to train, not to race. So by all means, ride with the club, especially in the early part of your preparation, and the odd cafe stop won't hurt either. However, with the race season just around the corner, you need to be thinking about some more specific training. Shorter, more intense training rides will get you fitter and more able to cope with longer distances.

Break up the 112 miles into more manageable distances and then ride faster. Instead of riding 100 miles at 15mph, try riding 30 miles at 19mph (18mph will give you a 6:13 Ironman bike split). Effectively you are doing speed work. In my own experience,

you do not need to do lots of long miles to become good at long distances – it's all about training smarter and harder.

Go short, go hard

If you use a heart-rate monitor, ride at an intensity that gives you 80% of maximum heart rate – for example if your maximum heart rate is 190, then 80% is 152. Rides of 90 minutes to 2 hours duration at this intensity are hard, but are great for building stamina and endurance and, of course, are time efficient. You will mainly use carbohydrates for this kind of training, so make sure you take an energy drink with you, as you can quickly become depleted. Try to aim for two rides a week. To add some variety, try long intervals at the same intensity: 4x15mins, 3x20mins or 2x30mins, all ridden at around 80% of max heart rate. I like to do a broken interval ride (fartlek). Basically, I make it up as I go along, doing intervals of various times and distances, but always looking for that 80% intensity. Rest periods should be kept short – perhaps 5-10 minutes.

As your fitness improves, you can add in the odd shorter, harder effort; 10- and 25-mile time trials are great for this kind of training. Sustained effort at 85% or more of your max heart rate is hard training, but very effective in building not only heart and lungs, but also leg strength. On race day it is essential that you pace your effort. What feels easy at 15 miles can feel very hard at 90 miles. Go off too fast and you will pay for it later, for sure. Using our example of a max HR of 190, try to stay around 75% of that (145). Of course, the fitter you are the higher percentage of your HR you can sustain. Another great benefit of riding time trials as part of your training is they allow you to monitor your fitness easily, especially if you use a heart-rate monitor or power meter.

I suggest you still do longer rides, perhaps once every two weeks.

Spending five to six hours in the saddle will help your body adjust to what you are going to ask it to do on race day. Of course, you will need to drop the intensity down: 70% of max heart rate for these longer rides. It is also an opportunity to work on your feeding strategy – what works, what doesn't, how much, that kind of thing. And don't forget that run afterwards, as even just a few miles will help you deal with transition.



Should you ditch the group rides when training for an Ironman?

Photos: James Lampard