

## **Exercising When Ill, Is It Safe?**

*by Jennifer Pecot, NTP, CHFS, AFAA Certified Personal Trainer and Licensed Boot Camp Challenge Instructor*

With cold and flu season upon us, many of you will be faced with the question “Can I work out, or should I rest when I’m ill?” The answer to this question will be based largely on the type of illness and whether or not fever is present. Differentiating between the three types of viruses that are most likely to rear their ugly heads during this time of year is the first step in deciding whether to rest or keep on moving.

About 40 percent of colds are caused by the rhinovirus.<sup>1</sup> With the common cold, headaches, loss of appetite and general aches and pains are rare. Fever, if present, will be low grade usually lasting 1-2 days. A mild sore throat and cough may also occur.<sup>2</sup> Moderate exercise during illnesses associated with the common cold is acceptable provided there is no fever. Frequency, intensity and duration should be modified to make workouts less strenuous until symptoms have subsided. In addition, adequate water intake is imperative! It is important to note here, one should never train or otherwise engage in strenuous activity when a fever is present due to the risk of heat stroke!

In the case of influenza, headache, sore throat, cough and general aches and pains are usually severe. Fever is high and lasts 4-5 days. In addition, fatigue and exhaustion may be moderate to severe and can linger for up to three weeks.<sup>2</sup> Generally, anyone who shows signs of systemic illness-- fever, excessive fatigue, muscle pain, swollen lymph nodes--should not train. Recovery usually takes about two to four weeks, especially to avoid complications. Only during convalescence, a week after complete absence of symptoms, should sports or exercise be resumed, with a gradual return to normal activity levels.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, mononucleosis (mono), caused by the Epstein-Barr virus, is characterized by mild headache, low grade fever lasting 7 to 10 days, severe sore throat and swollen lymph nodes, moderate aches and pains, and loss of appetite. Fatigue and exhaustion may last up to 6 weeks. In addition, it is very common for the spleen to become enlarged and for occasional jaundice to occur.<sup>2</sup> As with influenza, these signs of systemic illness require ample time for recovery before resuming physical activity. Remember, this should be a gradual return to normal activity levels. In the case of an enlarged spleen, it is especially important to gain clearance from your physician before engaging in contact sports.

Most importantly, listen to your body. If you push too hard, you may risk prolonged illness and possible injury. Here’s to a happy and healthy winter!

1. Misigoj-Durakovic, M., Durakovic, Z., Barsic, B. “To Exercise or not to Exercise in Acute Upper Respiratory tract Infections.” *Kinesiology* 37, No. 1 (2005): 5-12.

2. Saremi, Jodai. “Upper Respiratory Viral Infections in the Athlete.” *American Fitness*, Nov/Dec (2007): 60-63.