



Detraining During the Holiday Season

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The holiday season is here and for most people this means spending time with family and friends, traveling and attending social gatherings. In other words, most of you will have your normal daily routines disrupted. With so much going on this time of year, changes in your training schedule will be unavoidable. Depending on your individual training history and time away from training, progress may stop and some detraining or a loss of performance may occur. However, if you have been following a properly designed training program on a consistent basis, you shouldn't have anything to worry about. You may even experience some positive changes in performance as your body goes through the recovery process as discussed in my previous article.

The detraining process for physical qualities such as strength and aerobic endurance generally occurs in half the time it took to obtain the current level. If you have been participating in a consistent strength training program for two months then it would take approximately one month of no training to return to baseline levels. Although this is a good rule of thumb, detraining is highly specific to the individual and the specific physical abilities that have been developed. Studies on highly trained athletes have revealed some interesting data on the length of time needed before significant loss of previously trained abilities begin to occur:

- **Aerobic Endurance:** 30 days (+ or – 5 days). Aerobic endurance is what many people are referring to when they talk about “being in shape.”
- **Maximum Strength:** 30 days (+ or – 5 days). Gender and age will have an effect on maximum strength maintenance (females will decrease more rapidly and aging will accelerate the rate of strength loss after cessation of training).
- **Anaerobic Glycolytic Endurance:** 18 days (+ or – 4 days). This kind of endurance is involved in the high intensity short duration activities that create a lactic acid burn and can leave you feeling sick if not prepared for the intensity.
- **Strength Endurance:** 15 days (+ or – 5 days). Strength endurance is the ability to lift a moderate load for a certain length of time while resisting fatigue.
- **Maximum Speed:** 5 days (+ or – 3 days). Obviously, speed needs to be trained on a frequent basis for both maintenance and improvement.

As you can see, different physical improvements to your body will begin to decrease at different rates. In general, a beginner will experience a much faster and more severe decline in performance and fitness levels than someone who has been training for a more extensive amount of time. Furthermore, the longer you have been training a physical quality, the longer it takes for a decrease in that quality to occur.

Although the data presented is based on highly trained individuals, the take away message is that most of your training efforts will not immediately be gone after a few days away from training. I think the biggest factor is the disruption to your normal routine and the mental feeling of being away after consistently attending training sessions. After a few days away, it won't take long to get back into the routine and continue building on the previous progress made. Enjoy the holidays and train when you get a chance during your busy schedules!

Reference: Issurin, V. Block Periodization - Breakthrough in Sport Training: 2008. p 25-26.