

Physical stress is a good thing for athletes

By Alex Hutchinson, *Outside*

At Nike's Oregon Project, a training program for elite distance runners at the company's sprawling Beaverton campus, athletes have access to pretty much every recovery aid imaginable: a liquid-nitrogen-fueled cryosauna, an antigravity treadmill, an inflatable pneumatic compression tube, and on and on. So when 24-year-old Jackie Areson, an NCAA champ from the University of Tennessee, joined the group last May, she was looking forward to the advantage she'd get from ramping up her postworkout routine with the project's state-of-the-art techniques.

Instead, her new coach, exercise physiologist Steve Magness, told her to do exactly the opposite. "Whenever I'd mention things that I used to do in college, he'd be like, 'Oh yeah, don't do that anymore,'" says Areson, who will be chasing an Olympic spot in the 5,000 meters this summer. As Magness explained to her, "You want your body to learn how to recover on its own."

That theory runs counter to the pill-popping, ice-tubbing, massage-getting habits of most amateur athletes. We've become addicted to enhanced recovery, obsessed with erasing as quickly as possible the pain, fatigue, and inflammation that come from a hard workout. But some top scientists and coaches have adopted a new line of thinking: stress is a good thing, because it forces the body to adapt, repair itself, and come back stronger.

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