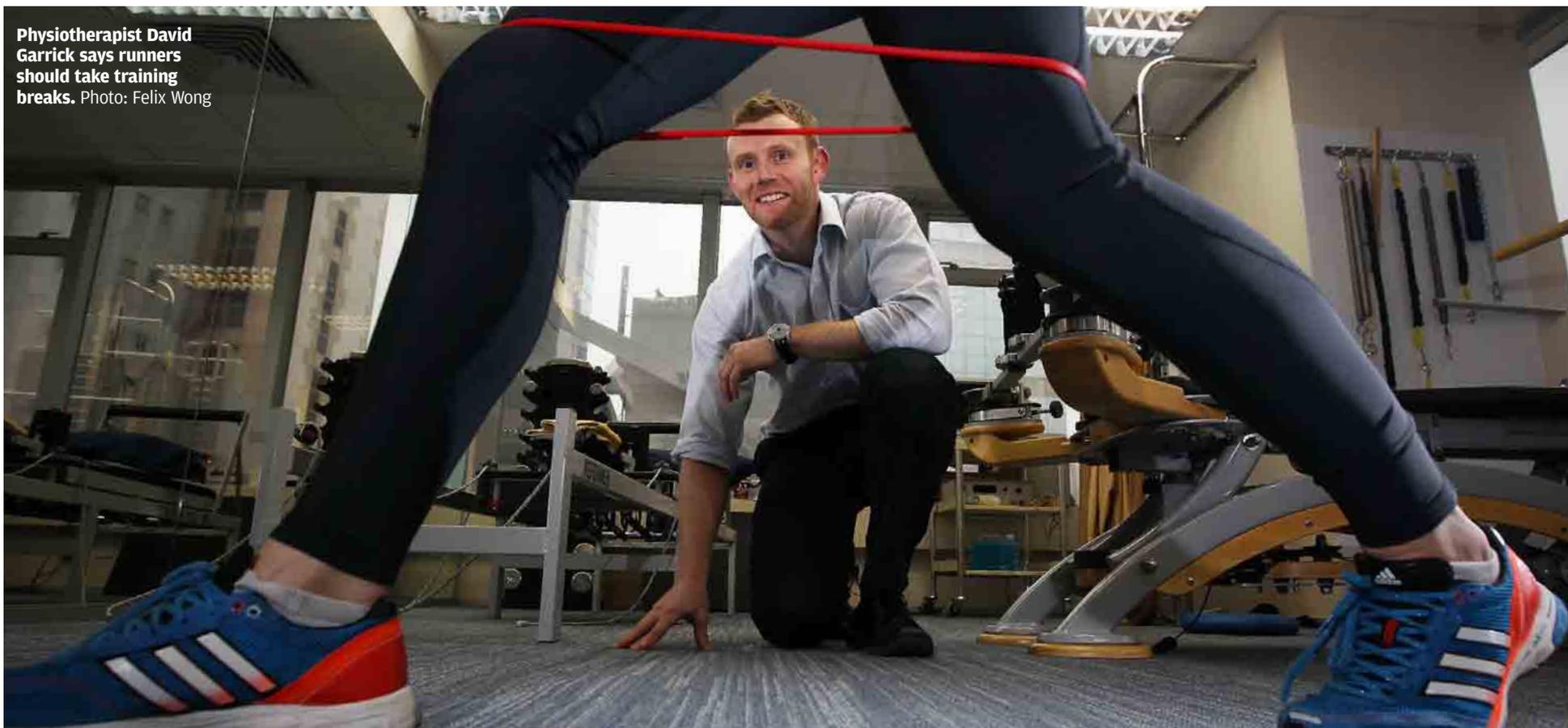


MARATHON MANIA WEEK 6

Physiotherapist David Garrick says runners should take training breaks. Photo: Felix Wong



Make the best of the rest

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Rest replaces my usual schedule of drills, speed work and long runs on Tuesdays and Saturdays. Being the competitive type, the “R word” is generally not part of my vocabulary and I’m often tempted to do something extra.

But the experts advise that recovery, done right, is the key to getting in top condition.

“Recovery is about letting your body heal so you can be ready for your next session,” says David Garrick, a physiotherapist from Physio Central in Central. He strongly encourages runners to take recovery seriously when undergoing intense training, such as interval, tempo or long runs. “Without adequate recovery, you will not reach peak performance and may be more prone to injury.”

Building recovery into a training programme will help your body to adapt to training loads, get stronger and give you a mental break to keep up the zest for running.

Rest – otherwise known as “passive recovery” – is the most common recovery method allowing muscles to repair, rebuild and strengthen says Dr Lobo Louie, associate professor at the department of physical education at Baptist University.

“Active recovery refers to engaging in low-intensity exercise after workouts during both the cool-down phase immediately after a

hard effort as well as during the days following the workout,” he says. An example would be a short, easy “recovery run” in the 24 hours after a hard session.

It seems counterintuitive to exercise more when you’re sore, but active recovery helps clear lactic acid (responsible for that feeling of “soreness” after a strenuous session) from the blood faster than passive recovery, according to a study published in 2010 in the *Journal of Sports Sciences*.

To see improvement over the long term, athletes should take a strategic approach to recovery, says Louie. “Any training regimen should also include periods of recovery, including full rest periods and cross training, modification in workout types, and changes in intensity, time, distance and all the other training variables,” he says.

Without proper recovery, athletes may end up doing more harm than good, resulting in “overtraining”. This is when the body is exerted beyond its ability to recover, resulting in exhaustion.

The amount and type of recovery depends on the individual and one’s training programme, says Dr Michael Tse, director of the Active Health Clinic at University of Hong Kong’s Institute of Human Performance. “There is no hard and fast rule,” he says. “Rest too much and you will lose fitness; rest too little and you are on the slippery path to overtraining.”

Recovery becomes more important after a longer and harder

session, and when you are training more than four times a week. A general rule of thumb, says Tse, is to always follow a strenuous session with active recovery.

There are a number of other recovery techniques, such as ice baths and proper nutrition, which can benefit every athlete, says Garrick. Here, he and other experts share their strategies:

Have an ice bath

“When you’re exercising, you get a lot of waste products developing in your body,” says Garrick. Icing assists the body to eliminate these products. “An ice bath is going to change your blood flow, flushing out waste products that might have built up from training,” he says.

While having an ice bath after each training session may seem excessive, running cold and hot water alternately over the legs will also help. Other methods to help flush out lactic acid include wearing compression gear and self-massage.

Get enough sleep

Louie says sleep helps the body repair itself. “Running causes physiological changes in the body, such as muscle tissue breakdown,” he says. “Eight hours of sleep is ideal.” Recent studies have shown that even more sleep – at least 10 hours a night – and napping where possible will also increase an athlete’s performance.

A 2011 study in *Sleep Journal*, found that collegiate basketball players on an increased sleep regime



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DAVID GARRICK, PHYSIOTHERAPIST

over a period of five to seven weeks reported faster sprint times, reaction times and better moods.

Eat within 30 minutes of finishing a workout

Proper refuelling after exercise is the most important aspect of a runner’s recovery, says Sylvia Lam, a dietitian at Pro Cardio. “Athletes need three things: carbohydrates to restore muscle glycogen, protein to repair muscles and fluids to rehydrate,” she says. “Our muscles store glycogen most efficiently within 30 minutes of completion of training, so it’s very important to have carbohydrates ready.”

Lam suggests easy-to-digest food such as smoothies, yogurt, fruit (such as bananas) or energy bars. For fluids, marathon runners should replace 125 to 150 per cent of fluid loss. Fluid loss can be calculated by subtracting your post-run weight from your pre-run weight, and adding any fluids you may have drunk during the run.

“It’s best to use sports drinks to replenish both fluids and electrolytes together,” says Lam.

Do a recovery run

Fan Siu-ping, a Hong Kong national marathon runner, says recovery runs are an important part of her training regimen. “The cycle of intensive workouts followed by rest and recovery has helped me gradually push my maximum performance,” she says.

Recovery runs should be short, between 30 to 45 minutes, and at a low intensity, says Garrick.

Marathon Mania is a 12-week series leading up to the Hong Kong Marathon on February 24. For more preparation tips, go to facebook.com/hkmarathon

RACHEL’S DIARY

Here’s a one-word description of my second three-week training block by coach Clinton Mackevicius: “tough”. Repetitions have stayed at the same speed but increased in time, and the 26-minute threshold session seems tougher than the 90-minute Sunday run. But it’s worth it. I’m running faster and for longer with less effort. I’m feeling on track for my five minute 20 seconds race pace. The big test will be the longer road sessions in the weeks to come. My current greatest challenge is staying motivated on flat roads when my mind idles. More on that next week.