

ME TIME

How to Recover Like an Elite Athlete

What if your training program began with a nap? Our columnist books a session.



Rebecca Bird

By Marisa Meltzer

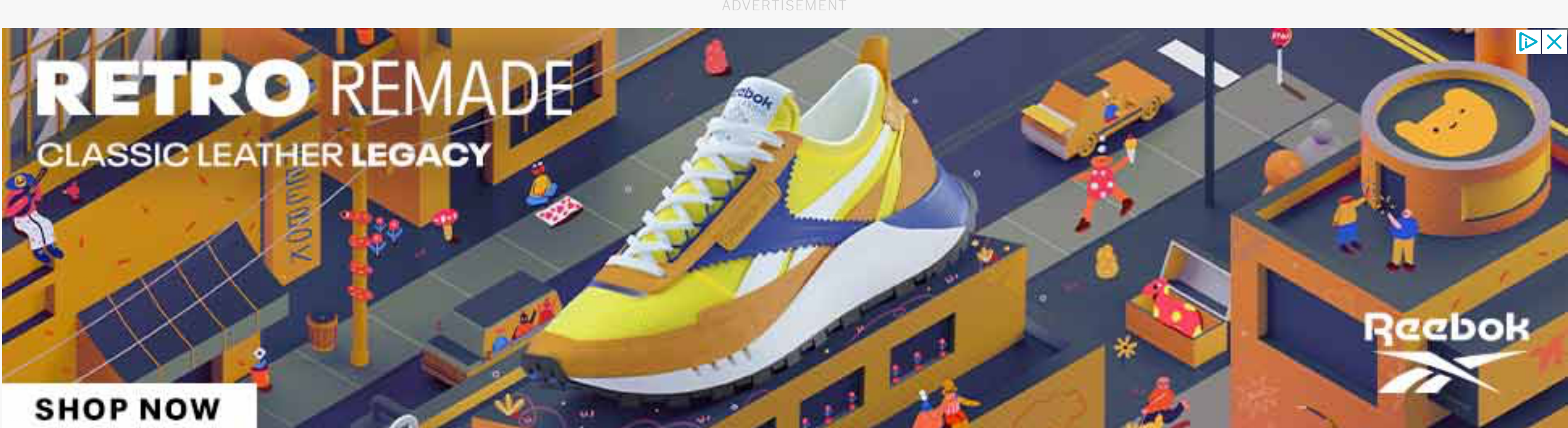
July 9, 2018

The best part of any exercise class is the few minutes of cooling down and recovery at the end. And, it turns out, it doesn’t just feel great; there has been a slow sea change in how we view recovery.

Rather than seeing it as the dessert at the end of the workout, fitness professionals are coming to look upon recovery as an integral part of training with short-term and long-term benefits, like helping to alleviate soreness and activating the parasympathetic nervous system, making us less stressed out. And with that comes new classes, services and strange machines — and, along with them, new ways to spend money.

[Tone House](#), whose high-intensity classes are so difficult that I spent my entire first class wondering whether I was going to vomit, now offers recovery workshops and cold tubs to soak in (the trainers suggest starting with just five minutes), which help reduce swelling after training and flush soreness-causing lactic acid from the body.

Or you can skip the workout portion altogether and go to [Stretchd](#), a studio in the Flatiron district that opened in May and offers assisted one-on-one stretching sessions.



One Monday afternoon I changed into soft clothes (the kind you would watch television in rather than exercise in) and let a stretcher named Jeff Brannigan gently coax my muscles out of their usual tightness. It felt like a combination of massage and assisted yoga and, after 55 minutes of doing little but lie on a padded table, I felt more limber and like my posture had improved.

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Further uptown, just in view of Madison Square Garden, is [Recover](#), which bills itself as New York’s first recovery studio. The owners, Aaron Drogoszewski and Rick Richey, are personal trainers certified by the National Academy of Sports Medicine who have created a space where you can train and then recover like an elite athlete via one of their many oddly named systems.

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In my first session, Mr. Drogoszewski actually began with, more or less, a nap as a warm-up. NuCalm uses biochemistry, physics and neurophysiology to quickly put you into a deeply relaxed state. What that translated to was sitting in a lounge chair with a “proprietary formula” calming cream dabbed on my neck and micro-current stimulators placed on top, a blackout eye mask and headphones with calm music playing.

It was heaven for 20 semiconscious, vaguely lucid minutes that promised to pack in the restorative benefits of two hours of sleep. The rationale, Mr. Drogoszewski said, was that beginning with a restorative practice helped me transition from my workday into the physically demanding personal training session he had planned for me.

Mostly I felt groggy and wanted to get back to my high-tech nap, but I gamely slipped on gloves for a boxing training session. Forty-five minutes of jabs and crosses later, and a recent viewing of “Creed,” made me feel as if I was well on my way to a new obsession.

We ended with 30 minutes on the CVAC (Cyclic Variations in Adaptive Conditioning), a slightly scary looking pod that uses fluctuating elevation, atmospheric pressure and oxygen to essentially wring out metabolic waste and help the body quickly recover from a workout. It feels like taking off and landing from a plane over and over for half an hour. It’s not uncomfortable unless your biggest fear is your ears popping, but it lacks the treat-yourself feel of my glorious NuCalm rest.

Two weeks later I met up with Mr. Richey for a strength-building session that began with a water-filled ball with handles, not unlike a kettlebell, which I used for trunk rotations and squats as a total body warm-up. Then we moved on to lunges, chest presses using a cable, more lunges, balance exercises, yet more lunges and then a circuit of resistance exercises like push-ups.

For recovery, Mr. Richey zipped compression sleeves that looked like a combination of sleeping bag and boot onto my legs to minimize muscle soreness and inflammation. They felt like a gentle leg massage for 30 minutes and gave me the look of someone who means business, as if I were training for a marathon. Then I spent 30 minutes in the Sunlighten mPulse full spectrum infrared sauna.

While I would gladly take an old-fashioned cedar sauna whose heated air (via fire or electricity) makes you so sweaty after a few minutes that jumping into a cold lake seems like a good idea, that is not always an option in my quotidian urban life. Infrared saunas use heat from the inside out, so you sweat more like you do when you’re exercising than when you enter a steamy room. And the air isn’t hot, so you can stay in the sauna much longer and sweat that much more. Just drink a lot of water.

After my sessions at Recover, I felt lively and energetic, clean from the inside out, as if I had eaten steamed vegetables for a few days, and I never once felt sore the next day. I plan on going again, not necessarily for training but to book a day of active recovery. Who needs to recover from exercise when we can just recover from the grueling slog of life?

Recover

What to Expect The owners are some of the most skilled and personable personal trainers in the city, but the real reason to come are the numerous methods they have for active recovery, including an infrared sauna, air compression and NuCalm for a high-tech nap.

Prices Treatments cost from 30 to \$130. NuCalm: \$65 for 30 minutes; CVAC: \$45 for 20 minutes; air compression: \$30 for 30 minutes; infrared sauna, \$45 for 30 minutes.

Recover, 360 Seventh Avenue, fourth floor, 646-883-2316; [recover.nyc](#)