

The Scheduling Problem

The scheduling problem can be summed up with two questions: When should I train? And how hard should I train? Whether you were aware of it or not, you've answered these questions every time you've ever done a workout.

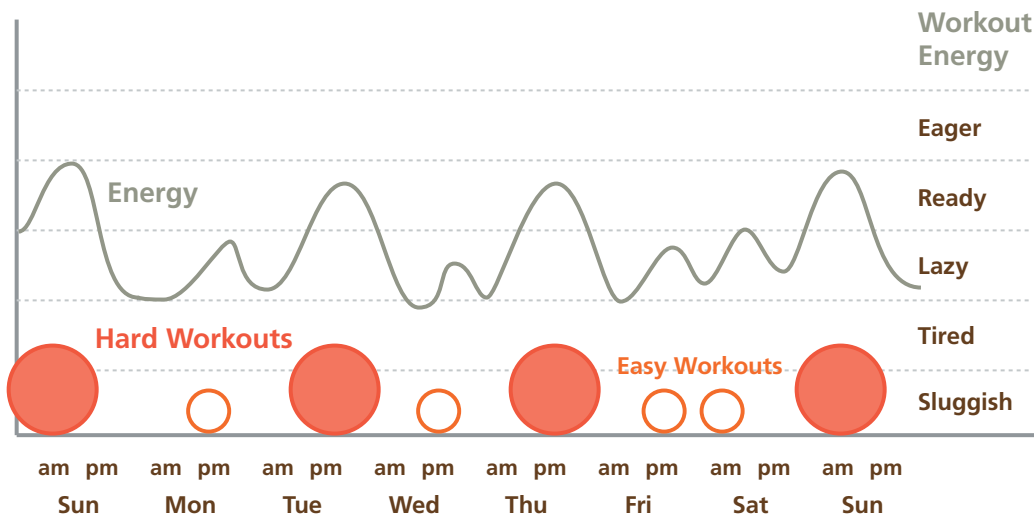
Providing an answer to the scheduling problem is not the same as providing a viable solution. Many runners hurt themselves by running their workouts out of convenience or impulse, rather than by following the rules of the game. In this sense, understanding how to schedule your workouts is the most basic problem of the training process. And viable solutions are the necessary prerequisite for effective training.

The hard-easy system is the most effective training system yet devised for solving the scheduling problem. Its first tenet: you cannot separate your training from your racing. And its necessary corollary: your training is connected to your races. A surprising set of tenets, considering we usually think of our workouts as being separate from one another, and separate from the races we are training for.

Yet, there must be a cause-and-effect relationship between training and racing, otherwise why bother to train? We might as well just go out and race. It follows that there must be a connection between our workouts and our races. In fact, no matter how many efforts we exert, they are all connected by the ebb and flow of metabolic energy cycles (see Figure 5-1).

Figure 5-1: The Flow of Energy During a Training Week.

All workouts are connected metabolically by the energy that flows during and between workouts.



Anytime you run, you have an immediate experience of energy. Sometimes you have ample energy and sometimes you feel like your tank is empty. Since your training affects your energy, the training decisions you make today will affect your energy in the workout or race you do tomorrow. As the first tenet states: you can't separate your training from your racing.

Using this idea, let's consider a short scheduling problem. Suppose you are planning a new training regimen for your next race, and you've decided to run a hard/ready workout every Sunday morning during the training period. When should you schedule your next hard/ready workout after the Sunday morning run? The simple answer is: when you are ready to run hard again. But the real issue is: when will that recovery point occur?

In order to schedule your next workout, you must know how much time you'll need to recover from your previous workout. In general, the harder the previous workout, the longer its necessary recovery period. Since a typical training schedule can include a range of workout efforts—from easy to hard—you'll need to know how much recovery time to schedule after each workout.

Fortunately, you can predict the time you'll need to recover from a workout, especially if the effort is optimal. Remember, an optimal effort is in harmony with your energy. Taking energy into account, Table 5-1 lists the amount of time needed to recover from the five optimal effort/energy combinations.

Table 5-1: Optimal Effort and Recovery Time.

Effort/Energy Combination:	Time Needed to Recover:
Very Hard/Eager Race	3 to 4 days, or longer
Hard/Ready	48 to 60 hours
Moderate/Lazy	24 to 36 hours
Easy/Tired	About 12 hours
Very Easy/Sluggish	Less than 12 hours

Let's return to our scheduling problem. According to Table 5-1, it takes forty-eight to sixty hours to recover from a hard/ready workout. Thus, if you plan to give yourself the minimum recovery time between hard/ready workouts, you would schedule another hard/ready workout on Tuesday morning—forty-eight hours after the Sunday morning run. Otherwise, you could wait until Tuesday afternoon, which would be sixty hours after the Sunday morning run.

When I recommend scheduling at least forty-eight to sixty hours between hard workouts I assume it will take you that long to recover from them. It doesn't matter whether you are an elite athlete or an age-group athlete. The recovery periods between hard workouts should be at least forty-eight to sixty hours, because—by definition—that's how long it will take you to recover from them.