

Overcoming the Burn While Climbing

How do I train my body to deal with and eliminate lactic acid/hydrogen ions faster, so I can climb longer and harder? The answer can be found in three key training components:

Key One: Breath it Out...way Out. The only way to eliminate lactate while in motion is through more effective respiration. Most of us tend to focus on getting oxygen in instead of pushing out Co₂ [metabolic byproduct] out. So my first suggestion is to focus more on exhalation while in climbing mode. Get Co₂ out of your system by pushing it out through forceful exhalations and let the natural pull of your lungs and diaphragm pull oxygen in for you. The more Co₂ you can expunge from your lungs, the higher you can raise your functional aerobic threshold and the stronger you'll climb.

Key Two: Pull Back and Up. If your quads are the only muscles burning during a climb, your leaving 1/2 to 2/3's of your climbing power on the table. The major muscle groups used for a good seated climb should also include your hamstring, glutes and hip flexors. Only get out of the saddle for really steep climbs or to cover an acceleration.

The idea here is to spread the effort across all available muscle groups to increase overall endurance. Most novices will pedal with a strong down stroke really hitting the quads hard, missing the opportunity to engage the hamstrings, glutes and hip flexors. A quality bike fitting session can help with muscular utilization here as well.

Focus on one angle of the pedal stroke for too long and you'll fatigue faster. Practice sliding back in your saddle slightly, picturing your leg pulling back and scraping against the ground, [engages hamstrings and glutes], then with that momentum, pull the knee up and toward your handlebar to engage the powerful hip flexor group.

Neuromuscular connections also have to be trained when engaging these muscle groups. Practicing on a trainer or indoor cycle will help you focus training these new movements without the distractions of a road ride. You can add isolations for each of these groups as you work through a

complete pedal cycle by turning off the down stroke and focusing on the pull back or pull up. Experiment with the feel of using certain portions of the stroke and not others...then bring it all together at the end. If you have access to a wattage meter it's neat to see the power increase at a given resistance as you engage all muscle groups.

Key Three: Relax! Teaching your body to relax while in discomfort doesn't come easily. Learning to anticipate and accept discomfort as a sign of hard effort, is something to be tolerated not avoided. It's important to separate discomfort and pain. Pain is usually a sharp unbearable signal that something is wrong and medical attention should be sought. To the inexperienced, there may appear to be little difference. You must relax your upper body as much as you can while keeping your chest open. Picture your body functioning in two parts almost like a duck in water. Nice and calm on the top, and working like mad down below. Add this to proper breathing, efficient mechanics and you have a working formula to help manage the burn and discomfort better than before.

Ride Hard! Relax!

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