

Overtraining doesn't only live in your legs.

Big training block, race nerves, work, family. If you're starting to feel awful, run through these five checks. Body and mind, side by side, because they're one system.

1 Check in: what's showing up?

Tick what's been true for most of the last 1–2 weeks. Overtraining shows up in your mood as much as your muscles, and your head often notices before your stopwatch does.

BODY

- ☐ **Working harder, going slower**
Same effort, worse splits.
- ☐ **Legs that never feel fresh**
Soreness that won't clear.
- ☐ **Tired, but sleep is off**
Waking up unrefreshed.
- ☐ **Heart rate or HRV off your normal**
Compared with your own baseline.
- ☐ **Catching every bug going**
Colds and niggles that won't shift.
- ☐ **Appetite has changed**
Not hungry, or craving sugar.

MIND

- ☐ **Flat. Nothing feels fun**
Even things outside training.
- ☐ **Short fuse**
Irritable with people you love.
- ☐ **Dreading sessions you loved**
Going through the motions.
- ☐ **“What's the point?”**
Not achieving anything.
- ☐ **Foggy and scattered**
Harder to focus or decide.
- ☐ **Anxious or on edge**
Race nerves spill into everything.

3 or more ticks, with at least one on each side, for a week or more? Treat it as a signal, not a weakness. Turn over to step 2.

2 Count your total load

Your body doesn't sort stress into "training" and "life". Work, kids, money and race nerves land in the same tank.

Try this: list everything on your plate this week: training, work, family. Heavy week? Drop or shorten one session.

The data: in one case study, an athlete's training didn't change but her life did. Her fatigue score rose 167%. For her, cutting training by 41% brought things back to normal in 10 days.

3 Check your fuel

Under-fuelling looks like overtraining and often hits your mood first. Missed or irregular periods? Talk to your GP.

Try this: after a hard session, eat a proper meal or snack with carbs and protein within 2 hours. Training again the same day? Carbs first.

The data: Olympic sports doctors (IOC, 2023) say to rule out low energy before calling it overtraining.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

70%+

of elite athletes with overtraining reported lost motivation and mood swings (139 Swiss athletes)

400

college swimmers tracked 1975–86: mood dropped as training rose, and recovered after

692

athletes across 16 studies (2025 review): more volume meant lower mood

4 Tired, or overtrained? It's a scale.

DAYS

Normal tiredness

Hard block, rest, bounce back stronger.

WEEKS TO MONTHS

Overreaching

Performance and mood dip and stay down. Very fixable if you catch it.

MONTHS OR LONGER

Overtraining syndrome

Rare, but serious. Needs medical support.

5 Know when to get support

Low most days for 2+ weeks, or no better after 2–4 weeks of easier training? Talk to your GP. If things feel like too much, call NHS 24 on **111** (mental health option), day or night.

Sources: Meeusen et al. 2013, ECSS/ACSM overtraining consensus · Piacentini & Meeusen 2015, IJSP · Mountjoy et al. 2023, IOC REDs consensus · Morgan et al. 1987, BJSM · Swiss elite athletes NFOR/OTS study 2013 · Mood & overtraining systematic review 2025 · ISSN nutrient timing position stand 2017. Education, not diagnosis.