

Training for long-distance walking after the age of forty



Is always interesting to discuss in relation to age, as the same body at different times of life, separated by decades, responds in completely different ways! After 40, you can still accomplish great things, and I can write this with absolute certainty as I am approaching 50 myself. Being athletic throughout life is possible and satisfying, but it's important to understand that at some point, you need to resort to some 'strategies' to achieve this goal in the best possible way. Let's see how...

The years in the sporting realm don't lend much help, and while in youth an athlete might have been capable of daily doubles in their favorite discipline and recover without too many issues, as time passes, the body changes and recovery abilities diminish decade by decade. It's not so much a matter of willpower changing because many people manage to complete very demanding workouts even at an advanced age.

However, despite considerable mental strength, if the body struggles to fully recover from the previous workout, then it will gradually begin to fall into debt! Accumulating a 'recovery debt,' session after session over time, will initiate an annoying element, namely a wear and tear process that will eventually lead to an injury. When an injury takes hold of someone who stubbornly continues with their workouts without taking appropriate countermeasures, everything becomes difficult. The problem rarely resolves spontaneously unless space is given for 'healing'. This often doesn't happen because physical compensation after a certain age is not as efficient. It's necessary to create the ideal conditions, and this is triggered by breaks. Spontaneous healing may be quite predictable in someone under thirty (also depending on the severity of the impairment), but it's not guaranteed despite their young age! Moreover, if the individual doesn't implement targeted recovery strategies and instead trains vigorously disregarding any sense of pain (often, the sensation of pain diminishes during exercise only to return more intensely afterward), it can lead to a chronic situation that results in a series of adaptations and compromises, imposing long otherwise avoidable breaks that are never appreciated by those who are very active. The passionate athlete forced to stop their outings isn't as serene to interrupt because their habit is one of a full life, and this can create a sort of comorbidity, linked to factors of psychological depression that inevitably emerge!

This is not an uncommon phenomenon, especially today when sports are very much in vogue! Often, practicing sports for beginners means improvising workouts without any logical cycling criteria. Sometimes, aspiring athletes engage in physical activity starting from the routines of 'great champions' in a specific sport, with the illusion that if those activities were performed by a high-level athlete, then they must work best. Unfortunately, things don't work out that way because the champion has rare abilities that characterize them, consisting of a large dose of willpower, an exceptional physique with unique recovery capabilities, and above all, in most cases, the young age of the protagonist during their glory days...

So if someone over forty suddenly decides to engage in sports out of the blue, following the routines of champions will undoubtedly lead to a big failure, often accompanied by great disappointment that could lead them to give up sports forever. Maybe with all the physical ailments of the just sustained overdoing!

Other athletes who engage in sports after forty, who were already active in their youth, simply repeat the programs of their past... However, this is no longer practicable due to their current age threshold. Thus, within a few weeks of physical activity, they end up discovering themselves facing the most annoying physical pains, combined with abnormal fatigue! These people inevitably start thinking that they're too old for sports, but that's not the case since it's sufficient to personalize the strategy...

There is another category of competitive athletes who have been good practitioners in sports since their youth but never champions. It often happens to such people that after a certain age, they decide to train every day in some specialty, hoping to transform themselves into champions from that point on. However, they fail to do so, and the reason is quite simple in this case. If they couldn't do it when their body was at its peak performance level (which was when they should have!), then why would they magically succeed after forty?! Often, even this category of athletes, who overdo it at a time when they should begin 'wise' training, find themselves stranded in a few months with ruinous injuries that will then force them into long and demoralizing breaks!

If we talk about very long distances on foot, both in races with ultratrail style and in solitary outings, there is still the concrete possibility of achieving great feats from all points of view at any age. However, at this stage, the priority

must be given not only to training but also to fundamental moments of physical and mental recovery (because even the brain gets tired!).

The technique of the Weekly Mono-training that I devised a few years ago naturally allows both the active movement part and the compensation part to be implemented by everyone. It should be noted that recovery is integral to any program, essential for athletes of all ages, and even more so for those who have crossed the forty-year threshold. In fact, there are important workout cycling passages that can be implemented. I won't delve into them in this article, but strategies in both duration and intensity must exist. Therefore, they can be undertaken by people who are no longer young but still desire to achieve excellent performance results. Notably, a good athlete at a certain point in life must be able to play the 'cards of wisdom,' patience, and strategy. As an athlete and coach, I have seen all kinds, and I can understand that for the simple sports enthusiast (especially the novice), it can be difficult to discern what is sustainable for their body from what represents overdoing it.

After all, it would be too easy to start training continuously and wait to 'become consequently' a formidable champion. If it were really that simple to excel in sports, everyone would do it, but that's not the case! In fact, it hardly ever happens because factors related to the combination of body and mind tend to nullify goals that are too far-fetched, to stay within a certain threshold of homeostasis. Training too much most of the time means doing too much to fall into wear and tear, traumatizing various systems over a certain period.

I'm often referred to the champion 'Pinco Pallino' who at 60, 70, or more years old is still there showing off in some sport. Well, it's certainly possible, but the fact that there are only a handful of people who manage to still be champions at that age means they possess something out of the ordinary, and therefore, one must be very cautious in trying to emulate them. Many situations are truly unsustainable even for a young athlete, so it's wise to listen to the signals that come from your own body to move forward 'one step at a time', and if someone has the ability to emerge even at an advanced age, they will certainly realize it!

I have met individuals between the ages of 30 and 50 who, for one or two years, achieved good results in ultratrail but then had to deal with frequent injuries due to overly intensive training. This led them to interrupt their training for long periods, allowing their bodies time to 'heal from the training damage'. However, it's curious to note that when they resumed, as soon as the situation normalized, they fell back into the same problems after a short time. The cause of their mistake is certainly the poor planning of their training, which remained unchanged after the obligatory break. Positive results are not always measurable by performance outcomes alone, but rather by sporting longevity!

The common mistake is often to value the athlete who becomes a champion for two or three years but then suddenly disappears because they are now physically 'broken'. Little value is given to the person who has consistently exercised from adolescence to eighty years old, to be able to support walking, cycling, running, swimming well into old age! Certainly, the better-trained of the two examples is the latter, as they have always engaged in physical activity for fun and health (here, the rules of fair play have much to teach).

In conclusion, it's important to measure the eagerness that enters into sports because eventually, the bill arrives, and often it's not a price that is taken lightly. However, one may wonder about the weight of competitiveness on an athlete's health compared to those who train to be well without adding anything more...?

UltraTrail book with Weekly Mono-training: <http://www.bertinettobartolomeodavide.it/ultratrail/index.html>

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