

Catch a cold? You can still workout

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About a decade ago, Thomas Weidner realized he was being asked a common question.

The director of the athletic training education program at Ball State University, Weidner was being approached each winter by athletes who were sick.

“In working with athletes who acquired a head cold (quite common) as an athletic trainer/sports medicine specialist, I realized that there were no guidelines for exercising with a cold,” Weidner wrote in an e-mail.

When you’ve got a cold, should you rest and help the body recover or continue your exercise regimen?

Weidner wasn’t sure, so he set out to study the question.

First, he and other researchers studied 24 men and 21 women, who were between the ages 18 to 29 and of varying levels of fitness. All were infected with a rhinovirus, while another group of 10 men and women were not infected and served as controls.

For the study, which appeared in the journal *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise* in 1998, the researchers assessed the lung functions and exercise capacity of all the subjects. The 45 subjects then had a cold virus was dropped into their nose, and all caught head colds.

Two days later, when their cold symptoms were at their worst, all the subjects exercised by running on a treadmill. The researchers reported that having a cold had no effect on either lung function or exercise capacity.

“Honestly, we were hoping the duration and severity of the cold would be mitigated somewhat (but no luck in this regard),” Weidner wrote.

For a second study, 34 young men and women were randomly assigned to a group that would exercise with a cold and 16 others who were assigned to rest. All were infected with a rhinovirus.

The group that exercised ran on a treadmill for 40 minutes every other day at 70 percent of their maximum heart rates.

Every 12 hours, all the subjects in the study completed 13-item questionnaires regarding their physical activity and their well being. The researchers, whose findings appeared in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* in 2003, also collected the subjects’ used facial tissues, weighing them to assess their cold symptoms.

There was no difference between the groups that rested and the ones that had a cold.

So, if you're under the weather, there's no reason to stop exercising.

“If the symptoms are restricted to a head cold, and no fever, then exercising with a cold does not seem to prolong the cold or make it worse (nor does it make it any better),” wrote Weidner, who is an avid cyclist.

“The advantage in continuing to exercise is to maintain fitness and enjoy the positive psychological effects such as improved mood (particularly when you are not feeling all that well).”