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**Overcoming a Performance Plateau**

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**How Cyclists Can Overcome a Workout Plateau and Keep Making Gains**

BEAT STAGNATION WITH THESE EXPERT-BACKED TIPS.

By Jenny McCoy / Published Oct. 11, 2023 / [Bicycling.com](https://www.bicycling.com)

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**Introduction**



You've been chasing a long-held goal for months, making steady [progress](#) towards it with every mile logged in the saddle. But suddenly, that progress comes to a screeching halt. Despite how hard you train, you're not getting any [faster](#) or [stronger](#). Somehow, breaking through to the next level seems impossible. What gives?

Chances are, you're experiencing a workout plateau—a period of stagnation in your training. Unfortunately, according to [Meghan Kennihan](#), certified personal trainer and USA Cycling level 3 coach in LaGrange, Illinois, cycling plateaus are pretty common. "Many cyclists encounter periods where their progress levels off despite [consistent training](#) efforts," she tells *Bicycling*.

Keep in mind plateaus can be physical *or* mental. While a physical plateau involves stalled performance, a mental plateau entails boredom and dwindling [motivation](#) to train. A physical plateau can lead to a mental one—and vice-versa, Paul Warloski, certified personal trainer, USA

Cycling level 2 coach, and owner of [Simple Endurance Coaching](#) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, tells *Bicycling*.

The silver lining to all this: Instead of getting discouraged by a plateau, you can use it as an opportunity to “fine-tune your approach and emerge as a stronger, more well-rounded cyclist,” says Kennihan.

Here, with the help of Kennihan and Warloski, we break down why workout plateaus happen, tips for overcoming them, and the telltale signs you may benefit from a break in training altogether.

### **Common Reasons Workout Plateaus Happen**

There are a bunch of reasons why plateaus happen. One big one? Your [training](#) isn't varied. Doing the same ride day in and day out can feel soothingly simple, but over time, that monotony doesn't lead to [performance gains](#). As Warloski explains it, if you don't expose your body to new stresses, then it won't have anything to adapt to, and that's where stagnation happens.

Another cause of workout plateaus is that you have limited time to [train](#) and have simply reached your peak given how much effort you're putting into your cycling. For example, if you only have four hours a week to hop on the saddle, at a certain point, you're “as good as you're gonna get, given the amount of training time and energy that you have available,” explains Warloski. (It's important to note that this is okay; you can simply strive to [maintain your fitness](#) rather than keep progressing it.)

On the other end of the spectrum, training too *much* and not taking adequate [recovery time](#) can also lead to plateauing, says Warloski, because your body is overwhelmed and unable to undergo the adaptations that lead to boosted performance.

Also worth considering: A poorly maintained bike can contribute to plateauing. “Components like the [chain](#), cassette, and [derailleur](#) may become dirty or worn, causing increased friction and reduced [efficiency](#),” explains Kennihan. “This can make it more challenging to reach and sustain higher [speeds](#) or [power outputs](#) during your training session.”

Moreover, underinflated [tires](#) can cause you to exert more force to maintain a pace. “This increased effort can lead to greater [fatigue](#), making it challenging to complete longer or more intense training sessions,” says Kennihan.

Off-the-bike factors can play a role, too. “Life stresses, such as a demanding job or family responsibilities, can lead to [physical fatigue](#),” says Kennihan. This fatigue can hamper your performance on the bike and lead to dwindling training motivation as well as screw with your [sleep](#) and [eating habits](#), both of which can negatively impact your recovery and ultimately sabotage your performance.

## 7 Tips for Overcoming a Cycling Plateau

Yes, plateaus blow, but there are simple actions you can take to overcome them. Here's what the experts recommend.

### 1. Identify the Cause

The first step in overcoming your plateau is identifying what's causing it, says Warloski. Take an honest look at your current [training plan](#)—and your overall lifestyle—and try to pinpoint any of the above causes.

Have you been doing the same exact [workout](#) day in and day out? When was the last time you took your bike in for a tune-up? Are you pretty limited in how many hours a week you can train? Are you [grinding too hard](#) without allowing your body ample downtime? Are other factors in your life—like your [stress levels](#), sleep habits, or [nutrition](#)—weighing down your training? Once you've drilled down *why* you might be stagnating, you can take the next step to correct it.

### 2. Try Something New in Training

If you suspect your plateau is triggered by a bland [training program](#), introduce small changes to challenge your body in new, different ways.

On the bike, if you typically just pedal at one steady speed, consider incorporating [high-intensity interval training](#) (HIIT), where you alternate between short bursts of max effort and periods of rest or low-effort work. “[HIIT](#) can help improve your speed, power, and cardiovascular fitness,” says Kennihan.

Similar to HIIT sessions, you could sprinkle [hill repeats](#) into your training. Simply find a steep ascent and [climb](#) it several times as a way to build strength and bolster climbing abilities, says Kennihan.

Another option is to “mix [indoor trainer workouts](#) with outdoor rides to vary the environment and training stimuli,” says Kennihan. Or, if you prefer to pedal only outdoors, switch up the [type of riding](#) you're doing—for example, instead of your regular old road riding routine, try [mountain biking](#), fat biking, or gravel biking for a change.

Off the bike, if you're not already [strength training](#), consider making that a regular part of your routine to help build [muscle strength](#) and power, says Kennihan. She recommends focusing on exercises that target the legs, core, and upper body to boost cycling performance and stability.

Another option: Weave [yoga or pilates](#) into your routine, as both practices can help you hone a comfortable, efficient posture on the bike by [improving your flexibility](#), balance, and core

strength, explains Kennihan. Or, dabble in [cross-training](#). Activities like [cross-country skiing](#), snowshoeing, running, playing tennis—really, “anything that’s just physically different than riding a bike,” says Warloski—can be beneficial.

### **3. Or Dial It Back**

If you’ve turned up the intensity on your workouts or haven’t had a recent day off, scale things back and place more emphasis on recovery activities, which include proper nutrition, [hydration](#), good sleep habits, and [stress management](#).

Though it may seem counterintuitive—how can training *less* lead to better results?—giving your body the downtime and [recovery tools](#) it needs to build back stronger after your workouts may ultimately be what you need to overcome your workout plateau. After all, it’s during the recovery time that the adaptations you made in training can take hold.

### **4. Get Regular Bike Tune-Ups**

Make sure your bike isn’t the culprit for your plateau by taking good, regular care of it. Frequently [clean the chain](#), cassette, and derailleur and replace those parts as needed. Also make sure your [tires](#) you’re riding at a good pressure.

### **5. Give Yourself a Break**

If life stressors are interfering with your training goals, do your best to manage those stressors (tools like [meditation](#) and [therapy](#) can help) and cut yourself some slack if you’re not hitting all your cycling goals. Not every training season needs to involve setting new PRs—sometimes cycling for the simple reason that you enjoy it can be motivation enough.

### **6. Consider a Coach**

If you’re unsure why you’re plateauing, or you’ve identified a possible cause but are uncertain how to fix it, consider tapping a [coach](#) or other qualified professional. They can provide a “fresh perspective,” says Kennihan and offer personalized tips for how to move your riding forward.

### **7. Know When It’s Time to Re-Evaluate Your Goals**

If, despite your best efforts to overcome a workout plateau, you’re struggling with persistent [fatigue](#), declining motivation, frequent [injuries](#), or stagnation in performance, then it’s probably best to take a step back from training, or dial back your goals, says Kennihan.

“It’s essential to listen to one’s body and mental state and be open to adapting goals when necessary,” she explains. This will not only up your chances of staying healthy in the short-term, but will ultimately help you become a happier cyclist in the long haul.

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See you next week.

Until then, make every ride epic.

Darryl