Exercise habits after menopause


Bugs and boats: an athlete’s view

As an athlete involved in a water sport many people ask if I am worried about Weil’s disease (leptospirosis) or if it occurs often in canoeing.

Most of our elite athletes train twice a day on the white water slalom course in Nottingham (fig 1), but may also use water pools, canals, or rivers as flat water training sites. Weil’s disease is more likely to be caught when canoeing on stagnant water, so there is some risk of exposure. For regular water users there is the possibility of subclinical infection not severe enough to be recognised. I know of only one suspected case of Weil’s disease within the team, but this was never positively diagnosed.

Our biggest worry is the common cold! It disrupts training and everyone is concerned about banned drugs, so we usually take nothing, which makes you a social outcast as no one wants to catch it!

As highly trained athletes our immune system seems to be under stress, and we seem to be susceptible to any illness lurking around. It may be that canoeists catch these bugs in the aerosol produced from the water, develop cold symptoms and later a chest complaint. On the other hand, we do not seem to pick up any gastrointestinal illness from the river water, even as the water levels change through the year.

The biggest worry is developing a respiratory problem at a selection race or important international event. When 100ths of a second may separate you from a place in the team or a medal, feeling 100 per cent fit is essential. We all try the natural remedies, such as vitamin C, but is there any more we might do to keep these bugs at bay? Do other water sports have similar problems?

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