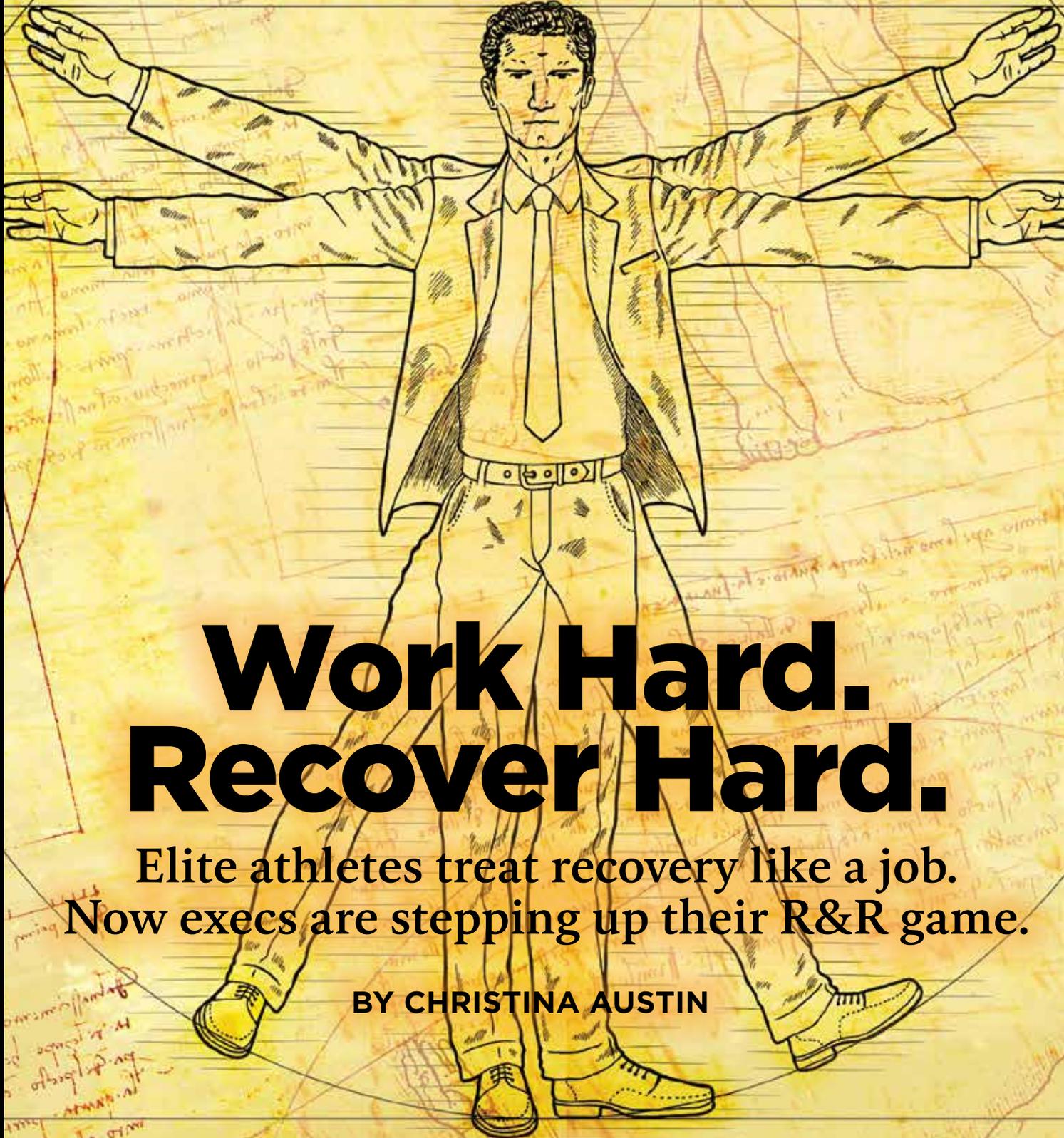


DOWN*TIME*



Work Hard. Recover Hard.

**Elite athletes treat recovery like a job.
Now execs are stepping up their R&R game.**

BY CHRISTINA AUSTIN

“
If you're a cognitive performer, you have to stop and refuel and recover too. You can't go-go-go.
 ”



A 21st-Century Chill Pill

These gadgets do the hard work of recovery so you can sit back, relax, and reap the benefits.

1 Whoop band. This wrist-based wearable tracks sleep, recovery, and strain, offering insights via an app to optimize both activity and recovery. **Free wrist strap with membership, \$30 per month**

2 Normatec 2.0. These boots use air compression to massage sore muscles and increase circulation. **\$899**

3 Joovv Solo 3.0. This light-therapy kit claims to enhance cellular function, reduce inflammation, and promote muscle recovery. **\$1,545**

4 Theragun Pro. Delivers up to 60 pounds of force for a handheld deep tissue massage that aids in muscle recovery. **\$599**

5 Cold Plunge. It's simple. Fill this chic tub with a hose, set the temp as low as 39 degrees Fahrenheit, and take a dip. **\$3,990**



Photo: Getty Images / John Fedele

Many of Satu Ahlman's clients wear a discreet ring, from the outside hardly distinguishable from a thick wedding band—except the inner face is lined with sensors. Those tiny computer chips, as coveted these days as any precious metal, measure heart-rate variability, body temperature, sleep quality, and a host of other biometrics. The data from the ring, which is made by a company called Oura, is then used to provide the elite performers Ahlman coaches with a recovery assessment, either giving them the green light to push harder or suggesting some extra rest. Ahlman's clients aren't athletes, though: they're executives.

Stress + rest = peak performance. While athletes have

long recognized that both inputs of the equation are equally important, executives are only just coming to terms with this inconvenient universal law. The trend is partially pandemic related, an outgrowth of heavy stress loads and a collective focus on wellness. At the same time, an entire marketplace of new wearables and at-home gadgets—from hyperbaric chambers and cold-plunge tanks to electromagnetic therapy and infrared-light kits—is bringing precision, novelty, and a healthy dose of overpriced hype to the age-old axiom.

“When you ask an athlete what's the most important thing, they say, ‘I need to recover properly and get good nutrition,’” says Ahlman, founder of Saga Performance, a

Nordic executive performance coaching firm. “If you're a cognitive performer, you have to stop and refuel and recover too. You can't go-go-go.” But good luck telling a hard-charging type A exec to take five. An afternoon nap to recharge the battery tank is simply anathema to them. Active recovery, which involves deliberate, restorative activities and uses specific recovery tools, is more palatable.

Twitter's Jack Dorsey and Salesforce's Marc Benioff have both backed the Oura Ring, while executives at companies like Las Vegas Sands have invested in thousands of rings for their employees. Whoop, another recovery-focused wearable, was recently valued at \$1.2 billion. Not only does it have contracts with the PGA and the NFL, but Tory Burch recently handed out hundreds of the bands to its workers. Both devices soared in popularity after they were shown to detect early-onset COVID-19 symptoms. Whoop tells wearers how long they need to recover before exerting themselves, and how hard they can push when they do. Drink a glass of wine and that recovery time is going to be prolonged, while a good night's sleep can significantly cut it down. It's all about balancing the equation.

That's exactly what Exos—which has dubbed itself “the human performance company”—strives to do by bringing together sports training, healthcare, and corporate wellness. Recently listed as one of the US's 5,000 fastest-growing companies for five years straight, Exos coaches execs on four pillars: mindset, nutrition, movement, and recovery. Peer into one of the company's many facilities across the country, and you'll see professional athletes reclining next to Fortune 500 CEOs in Normatec compression boots, which improve blood flow and circulation, or pelting themselves with a percussion gun to promote muscle healing.

Beyond high-voltage toys (some of which have more scientific backing than others) are the tried-and-true methods: Mild movement, like going for a walk or bike ride. Plunging into cold water. Sleep. Nutrition. Nature. Despite the growing reliance on expensive tools and exhaustive data, Lance Dalleck, a sports science professor at Western Colorado University who studies recovery, is skeptical: “I watch our track athletes finish their workouts right outside our lab, and they stretch forever, and they talk, and they foam-roll—and I'm like, ‘Eat something! Drink something!’” Based on his research, proper sleep and nutrition are the two most important components. Christie Aschwanden's book *Good to Go* dives deep into the science of recovery. Her conclusion? “If something is helping you and your muscles relax, that's good enough.”