# Medal Man: Jim Howley (POZ December 1994/January 1995)

For triathlete Jim Howley, AIDS is a second chance -- to come in first

July 1, 1997 By Manjula Martin

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Jim Howley is coming soon to a neighborhood near you. Watch closely -- if you blink, you may miss Howley whizzing by in a blur of bicycle wheels, butterfly strokes and speeding sneakers. An accomplished triathlete, Howley (profiled in *POZ December 1994/January 1995*) has successfully completed the grueling Ironman Triathlon and more than 30 other marathons. As Howley talked with POZ, he was preparing to embark on a new first: The Polar Trans-Continental Triathlon for Life -- 54 days of running, biking and swimming across the country. Howley hopes his solo journey will raise $250,000 for AIDS, cancer and multiple sclerosis organizations.

When he's not traversing the country, Howley heads Athletics Instead of Depression and Sickness (AIDS), a Santa Barbara nonprofit organization. Howley, who holds a master's in clinical psychology, speaks publicly about depression and athletics. He shares his pill schedule, workout schedule and advice for the would-be athlete in all of us.

**Are you on any meds?**

I started out in a clinical study of ritonavir (Norvir). I was on the placebo, but I didn't know it. I had two T-cells and I also developed cytomegalovirus (CMV) infection, so I started getting the real drug. After that my T-cells jumped to 260 and my viral load became undetectable. Now I take a combination of Norvir, Invirase (saquinavir) and either AZT, 3TC, ddC or d4T (I rotate between the four nucleosides every two months). It's an extremely experimental combo, one that's not common, but I've consulted with my doctor and we feel it's what works best for me.

I also tried Crixivan (indinavir) for a while, but with Crixivan you can't eat after you take the pill. Since I'm training all the time, I have to eat a lot -- I need the energy. So I ended up not taking my pills.

I think people should take the drug that fits into their lifestyle. Drug failure is like condom failure -- it's actually operator failure. They break when used incorrectly. Not that everyone should take meds -- there are some people they really don't work for.

In addition to the meds, I have acupuncture once a week. I'm a firm believer in it. I also rely

heavily on massage, chiropractic and seeing my therapist. And, of course, athletics.

**How often do you work out?**

I train for at least 90 minutes a day, three to five times a week. I swim 2,400 meters a week, bike 300 miles a week, run 55 miles a week and lift weights twice a week. Athletics have helped prolong my life. Exercise can greatly improve immune function and build lean muscle mass -- it works.

**Do athletics have a psychological, as well as physical, effect on your health?**

Before I was diagnosed in 1989 I was smoking, doing cocaine, all sorts of things. But when the test came back positive, I decided to start training. And once I put exercise in my life, it replaced the bad things. Exercise also moves AIDS to a smaller part of my life, so it's not my whole identity.

**To a lot of people who don't exercise, the idea of working out regularly is daunting. What start-up advice would you give to the PWA who is a novice athlete?**

Start small: Most people can jog for at least two minutes at a time. So set your watch -- jog two minutes, walk two minutes, then try to jog some more. Then work up from there.

**Are you concerned about the physical strain of such a huge cross-country trip?**

I know it's going to be really hard, but it's so worthwhile. AIDS was my second chance, and I think I got that chance so I can let people know that PWAs don't have to just sit around waiting to die. The harder I've worked to stay alive, the luckier I've been. That doesn't just happen by itself -- living takes hard work.

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