



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission



Injury Management

As an elite athlete it is highly likely that you will experience an injury at some point in your career. The impact of injury is far more than physical. It can potentially jeopardise your confidence, self-esteem and sense of identity. It is therefore important to know that there is a typical three-step psychological process that athletes experience when dealing with an injury.

1 Processing the injury – initial pain and questioning about how the injury occurred.

2 Emotional reaction – experiencing feelings of shock, denial and isolation from their support network.

3 Positive outlook and coping – gradually moving towards acceptance of the injury and adopting an optimistic attitude about rehabilitation.

GENERAL INJURY REHABILITATION PLAN

As a general guide to ensure a positive recovery from injury, you should consider:

- > maintaining a strong support network
- > attending particular training sessions to maintain connection with other athletes and coaching staff
- > learning about the physiological nature of your injury to help you better understand the recovery process and set goals
- > using the injury as an opportunity to perfect the tactical side of your performance
- > watching videos of yourself before the injury to gain a clearer image during visualisation
- > taking advice from other athletes who have experienced injuries, and using their personal anecdotes as a source of inspiration.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH INJURY

Goal setting

In conjunction with your coach and physiotherapist, set some goals that emphasise effort and steady improvement in ability. Your goals should include a realistic date to return to competition; the amount and types of treatment; and the number/progress of range of movement, strength and endurance activities to include in recovery sessions.

Imagery

Try visualising your rehabilitation exercises to help develop muscle memory, or mentally rehearse successful post-rehabilitation performance to help maintain confidence and skill memory.

Relaxation

Relaxation can aid in managing the pain and stress that often accompanies severe injury, and can also facilitate sleep and reduce general levels of tension.

Thought management

An optimistic state of mind and positive self-talk can keep you striving for a successful injury rehabilitation. Make a list of positive statements you can tell yourself when the going gets tough (for example, 'I am recovering well', or 'I am improving every day').

Athletes often experience a number of negative psychological effects when injured. If you are experiencing the following warning signs, please contact Performance Psychology so that we can help you get back on track:

- > poor sleep
- > poor attitude to training/competition
- > increased resting heart rate
- > poor general health.

TAKE ACTION

You can develop this skill further with the support of a performance psychologist. If you have access to a performance psychologist speak to them of your interest in this area. If not, your coach, state institute or academy, or national sporting organisation, are good places to start looking for further help.