

Any sports enthusiast who's ever been injured knows how frustrating it is when an injury occurs. Besides

having to deal with the pain and discomfort, it can be very disheartening to see all that hard work seemingly go to waste. Yet the key, advises Chinnor based personal fitness trainer Hilary Westall, is to manage your recovery so that you stay in the best shape possible, both physically and mentally, to get back on track.



What to look out for

It's often hard to distinguish between general stiffness and soreness after a workout, and the beginnings of an injury, particularly if you are new to exercise or have tried something unfamiliar. If you are back to normal after a couple of days, then you are probably fine to continue. Some injuries occur immediately – a sprained ankle for example – whilst others creep up on you slowly, gradually getting worse over a period of days, weeks or months, so it's important to pay attention to both types and not take any chances with the following signs and symptoms:

- Reduced range of movement around the joint.
- Swelling and heat around the injury, sometimes accompanied by redness.
- Loss of strength.
- Numbness or tingling, which could indicate nerve compression.
- Pain – any discomfort that gets worse during a training session, or continues afterwards, is your body's way of letting you know that something is wrong.

Seek treatment

If you are in any doubt about an injury, do get it properly assessed by a suitably qualified practitioner. Your first port of call may be your GP, who can refer you on for treatment if necessary. If you are more knowledgeable about your condition, you may wish to book in with a physiotherapist, chiropractor, or sports therapist for immediate treatment. Take the time to learn as much as you can about your injury, as not fully understanding it can be a cause of anxiety. The more you know, the more you will know what to expect, which will give you a greater sense of control. Ask the following questions so that you can act accordingly:

- What type of injury do I have (e.g. muscular, ligament, strain, tear, etc.)?
- How long will it take to get better?
- What can I do to speed up the recovery (e.g. icing, resting, stretching exercises)?
- What alternative workouts can I safely do (e.g. swimming, low impact exercise, cycling instead of running)?

Dealing with injury

Accept your situation

It's easy to fall into a negative 'why me?' downward spiral of thinking when you're injured, which can lead to a loss in motivation and a dip in confidence. However, you are the only one who can fully determine the outcome of your injury and if you ignore signs and symptoms by continuing to train, you may be out of action for longer than if you had heeded the symptoms early on. By taking responsibility for your recovery and taking appropriate action, you will progress faster than if you dwell on the past or blame outside factors. Accept that setbacks occur in life and that things don't always go to plan – but that it doesn't have to be the end.

Focus on the positives and adjust your goals

Commit to overcoming your injury by doing what your doctor or therapist tells you and focus on the best of your situation. If handled positively, enforced rest can give you the determination and enthusiasm to come back fitter and stronger than before. So, instead of viewing your injury as a crisis, make it another challenge – recovery instead of performance - to keep you motivated. Tracking small improvements in progress will give you the confidence to keep going.

Enlist support

If you are a member of a sports club or team, maintain contact with your teammates, friends and coaches, who can be an invaluable source of support, help and encouragement during your rehabilitation, especially if they have been through a similar experience.

Look for alternatives

Depending on the type of injury you have, you will almost certainly be able to do some form of physical exercise while

you recover, which will help maintain your fitness levels and motivation. You may even discover an alternative sport that suits you better, or that you can add to your existing regime. Swimming, for example, is non weight bearing, gives you a good cardiovascular workout and loosens up tight muscles. If you have a running injury, you may be able to cycle and do low impact exercise. Use this time to focus on flexibility work with a modified strength training programme that is specific to your needs. A qualified trainer can help you put such a programme together if you need help. Don't try and do too much too soon or you may end up prolonging your recovery. Be realistic and stay within your limits.

Now is also the time to pay more attention to your nutritional needs to assist in recovery and not succumb to comfort eating!

With adequate knowledge, support and patience, you can come back from an injury without it destroying your fitness or your confidence. By taking things slowly, being realistic about what you can do and taking a focused and positive approach, you will get back on track with the knowledge to help you avoid injury in the future.

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She runs her own 'Core Strength & Stretch' class on Friday mornings in the Reading Room, Chinnor High Street, 9.30-10.30am. Contact her for further details.



COMPETITION

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