

SPORT INJURY – HEALING THE MIND AND BODY

by Nancy Rebel, SIRC

Every athlete, competitive through recreational, experiences injury in their sport at some time. There are many practitioners out there who can help heal the physical symptoms of the injury from the family doctor to the physical therapist. But dealing with the physical side of injury is only half the battle. We can not forget to address the importance of healing the mind of the injured athlete. So what kinds of things do injured athletes feel and how can we as athletes, teammates, coaches, parents and friends help with the recovery process?

Many things can influence the way a person feels about their injury such as: the severity of the injury, previous injuries, their position on a team, their family and friends, and the type of sport they play. Girls often experience greater injury anxiety than boys. All of these factors combine together to leave the athlete dealing not only with the injury but a whole host of fears and insecurities. A



player may experience fear about feeling left-out of team activities. They may feel that they are letting themselves and their teammates down. Some may feel that they will lose their place on the team with prolonged absence. Many may have a fear regarding their ability to return to their pre-injury skill level or re-injuring themselves. Some athletes have trouble with their self-esteem and self-worth, wondering who they are if they can not be the athlete they are used to being.

So what can we do to help an injured athlete through their recovery? As coaches, parents, teammates, and friends we can support an injured athlete in many ways. First of all, it is important that we understand what they are feeling by having them talk about their fears. It is also important to find out how much support and what kind of support the athlete wants. We can involve the athlete and provide them with feelings of control by helping them imagine

TIPS TO HELP ATHLETES COPE WITH INJURIES:

- Have injured athletes to talk about their fears
- Provide athletes with meaningful ways to interact with their teams (e.g., through team meetings or strength training sessions)
- Provide role models of other athletes who have successfully recovered and returned to sport
- Help give athletes control over the timing of their return, making sure they are returning for the right reasons at the right time not out of feelings of pressure
- Help establish realistic expectations and short-term goals for recovery and return to play

and plan a healthy and successful recovery and return to participation. We can help them maintain their confidence by continuing to train those parts of their body that they still can. We can provide them with tangible and progressive physical challenges to meet along their road to recovery. We can also provide them with meaningful opportunities to interact with their teammates.

By addressing the mental aspects of injury and recovery, an athlete is more likely to have a healthy and productive return to the sport they enjoy so much. And after all, that is what success is all about!



For more information on coaching and injury prevention visit the SIRC Sport Library at www.sirc.ca

SIRC
Sport Research
Intelligence sportive

Resources:

Podlog, L., *Returning to sport following injury*. SportHealth 24(4), Summer 2006-07, p.14-17.
Wrisberg, C.A. & Fisher, L.A., *Staying Connected to Teammates During Rehabilitation*. Athletic Therapy Today 10(2), March 2005, p.62-63.
Wrisberg, C.A. & Fisher, L.A., *Understanding Sport-Injury Anxiety*. Athletic Therapy Today 11(4), July 2006, p.57-58.