**Bouncing Back After an Injury**

Getting injured is one of the most common reasons that people give up on an exercise commitment. When you are injured, either from an accident or as a result of surgery, it makes sense to take it easy. Your doctor may even spell out exactly what you shouldn’t do and for how long you should give yourself time to heal.

At other times, the injury isn’t severe enough to require medical help (like a twisted ankle, shin splints, or a sore joint), or an illness like a cold or the flu, but they can still be enough to derail your workout, if you let them. But the truth is that with a little care and lot of commitment, you can find a way to stay in the workout habit until you are feeling like your old self.

If you’re under a doctor’s care, start with getting specific instructions on what not to do and for how long. Then specifically ask what you ARE allowed to do. Here are some ideas:

* Is walking OK? Stair climbing? Elliptical trainer?
* Is weight training OK on the unaffected limbs? Are there restrictions on how much weight I can lift?
* Are other types of cardio activity OK? Should I keep my heart rate under a certain limit?
* What about stretching?

It’s important to follow your doctor’s advice. Having said that, I know too many people who treat an injury or illness as an excuse to stay away from the gym for a long time, perhaps even permanently. Even if you require total bed rest immediately after an injury or illness, at some point, your doctor will want you to get up and get moving because it will help you recover. So ask what you can do and when you can do it so you can get going!

How about those injuries that don’t send you to the doctor or urgent care? Turned ankles, sore muscles and aching joints are among the most common minor injuries that slow down people’s workout schedules. Anything that lasts for more than a few days, seems to get worse, becomes very badly swollen or gets hot to the touch should be checked out by a doctor, pronto. But for annoying but minor injuries, here are some tips to get you back in action.

Pull a muscle? Just remember RICE. That stands for Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation. It’s an old tried-and-true remedy because it works. Take a day off (at least for movements that utilize the sore muscle.) Use ice packs to help reduce swelling and pain. Plan on using the ice for about ten to fifteen minutes at a time, keeping the ice on the sore muscle for part of every waking hour or until it starts to feel better (which may take one or two days). Use an ACE bandage to compress the sore muscle (follow directions so that it’s just tight enough). Elevate the sore limb whenever possible to reduce swelling.

How do you know if it’s more than just a sore muscle? You may have an acute injury if you have severe pain, sudden and severe swelling, or you can’t place weight on a limb or joint or use it in its normal function. That’s when it’s best to see a doctor. Extreme weakness in the sore limb is another red flag, as is a joint or bone that looks out of place.

Chronic injuries happen as a result of repeated overuse or injury from an activity you’ve been doing for a while. If it hurts to play or exercise or you have a dull ache that just won’t go away, even when you’re at rest, it’s time to see a doctor. Don’t wait—get it checked out by a professional and follow the directions you’re given so you can be back in action safely as soon as possible.

If the RICE method and some over-the-counter pain reducers like Tylenol or Advil don’t work, and the pain doesn’t go away in a few days, get thee to a doctor. Don’t expect your instructor to diagnose your injury: by law, aerobics instructors aren’t allowed to do more than give the most basic advice (usually RICE). Most of the time, you’ll have strained a muscle or overworked a joint, but it is possible to create conditions that your body will react to by developing a chronic condition that can cause you a lot of trouble if it isn’t caught right away. Nip injuries in the bud, give the acute ones plenty of recovery time, and take the stubborn ones to your doctor for advice.

Here are some more helpful links to help you decide whether you’ve got an acute or chronic injury: <http://www.aboutaerobics.com/injuries-aerobics.html>

<http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Sports_Injuries/sports_injuries_ff.asp>