



How to Cope With a Sports Injury

Exercise-related injuries can be frustrating. Here's how to get on the mend in no time.

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It happens to the best of us: You slipped and fell on the tennis court while lunging for a drop shot, twisting your ankle. Or you embarked on an overzealous running regimen and wound up with a case of stiff, achy knees a few weeks later. From shin splints to sprained ankles, exercise-related injuries are a frustration known to elite athletes and weekend warriors alike. If you do find yourself sidelined by a pesky injury, how can you get back into fighting shape? And how can you stay fit even while you're recovering from an injury?

To get some answers, we spoke to [Franci Cohen](#)—a renowned personal trainer, certified nutritionist and exercise physiologist—who shares tips for preventing, recovering from, and exercising with sports injuries. No matter how severe your injury is, don't fret! With plenty of ice and little bit of patience, you'll be back in the game in no time.



Franci Cohen, exercise physiologist

Spry Living: What are the most common sports injuries you see?

Franci Cohen: The most common injuries should really be classified with respect to a given sport or group exercise environment, because each type of training places different stresses on different parts of the body, making those more prone to injury. For example, the lateral cardio movements in an aerobics class can often lead to spills that cause strains or sprains in the tendons and ligaments of the ankle, while a baseball player will be prone to rotator cuff injuries of the shoulder. Generally speaking, though, the most common injuries I see as an ex-group instructor are knee injuries (usually as a result of improper squatting or other exercises where a new client may hyperflex the knees too much), strains/sprains in the arms or ankles, bursitis, plantar fasciitis, and shin splints.

Spry Living: What's the difference between overuse sports injuries and acute sports injuries?

An overuse injury is a cumulative excessive effect of repetitive stress on specific muscles, tendons or joints, resulting in varying degrees of trauma to the given area/areas. For example, runners may experience shin splints as a common overuse injury. Overuse injuries develop gradually over time.

By contrast, an acute injury occurs suddenly when exercising, and swelling and severe pain are often present. For example, spraining an ankle, fracturing a bone, or tearing a tendon are all examples of acute injuries. Acute injuries are not a result of overuse, and are instead an immediate result of severe trauma to a bone, muscle, ligament or tendon. Acute injuries often require immediate medical attention.

Spry Living: If somebody has an overuse injury (i.e., knee tendonitis) related to a specific activity (i.e., running), can they still continue to run, or should they avoid the activity altogether?

It depends. Resting an area affected by an overuse injury allows the damaged tissues to heal, but not always in the most functional way (and it doesn't correct the underlying cause of the injury). For example, while you may need to stop running for a while when suffering from Achilles tendinitis, you should not simply rest. Physical therapy or such practices like [Rolfing](#) may offer relief from symptoms. Generally speaking, the decision to stop or continue exercising with the presence of an overuse injury depends on many variables including the degree of inflammation, amount of pain, and whether or not exercising exacerbates the symptoms.

Spry Living: What are the perils of pushing yourself too hard and exercising with an injury? In what situation should an individual stop exercising altogether?

Pushing too hard in the presence of an injury can make the injury much worse! If you have chronic tendinitis, bursitis, or any other inflammatory injury due to overuse, you can try to continue exercising provided that you ice and rest the area properly pre- and post-exercise to manage inflammation and symptoms. If you have a more serious injury such as muscle or tendon tear, or a bad sprain, exercising is not recommended. At times it can cause greater and even permanent damage. Wait until you heal completely, before getting back into your routine.

Spry Living: What are some good exercise options for somebody with a sports injury?

It depends on the nature and location of the injury. For example, someone with Achilles tendinitis as a result of running may find yoga or Pilates to be a nice alternative until they heal, while someone suffering from elbow bursitis may opt for indoor cycling until they heal, because it doesn't place too much stress on the elbow joint.

Spry Living: What are some of the recommended treatment options for an injured person?

The treatment course depends on the nature of the injury, but in general, many overuse injuries center around inflammatory conditions. As such, treatments such as icing, physical therapy, acupuncture, and Rolfing, have been successful in reducing inflammation and relieving symptoms. A good rule of thumb to follow? R.E.S.T. (Rest, ice, compress, elevate).

Spry Living: What are the top ways to prevent sports injuries?

1. Trust Borg (well, sometimes). Since the cardiovascular system improves at a faster rate than the musculoskeletal system, reliance on Borg's rate of perceived exertion chart to determine your workouts can cause you to over-stress the bones, joints, tendons, ligaments, and muscles. Limit your increases in both intensity and duration of your conditioning program to no more than ten percent per week. This gives the body time to adapt to the stress provided by exercise, and will reduce the risks of overuse injuries.

2. Mix it up. If you are training for increased performance, try one day on (full force), and one day off (rest day). Maximum gains in conditioning are obtained when sufficient rest is alternated with exercise. This enables the tissues to adapt to increase workloads of exercise, and to increase functioning accordingly. Inadequate rest periods in between exercise increases the probability of sustaining an injury.

3. Take it easy. Training errors can occur when you enthusiastically take on too much or too stressful of a physical activity too fast. Going too fast, exercising for too long or simply doing too much of one type of activity repeatedly can strain your muscles and lead to an overuse injury.

4. Focus on form. Bad form can also adversely affect your body. If your form is way off while performing a set of strength training exercises, squatting, lunging, or throwing a basketball jump shot, for example, you can cause an overuse injury.

5. Warm up and cool down. Do not discount the importance of warming up and cooling down. When muscles are warmed properly, they are most receptive to growth, and are less likely to get damaged during exercise. Exercising without a proper warm-up can lead to muscle tears and pulls, and not cooling down properly can cause inflammation and damage due to lactic acid build up in the joints.