

ACUTE SPORTS INJURIES—PART II: REST, RECOVERY & REHAB



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It has been an amazing experience being on the other side of the fence for once. After undergoing knee reconstructive surgery I have 'become the patient' and I have taken on a greater understanding and a new appreciation of what it takes to get through it. I have rehabilitated hundreds of patients following knee surgery, and now I finally know 'how it feels' and understand the importance of rest, recovery and rehab.

REST



Every patient that undergoes significant injury or orthopaedic surgery will experience pain. It's natural. If you have a ligament drilled into your knee fixated with two titanium screws, it's going to be painful afterwards. The surgeons do a great job in making it perfect, and my surgery, thanks to Dr Simon Tan was first class and the

best operation result I have seen in any of my patients. And I am not being biased. However as he said—it will hurt.

The Rest phase is where you take as much advice, direction and care from the Physio, Nurses and your Doctor. They are your guidance and your savours to get through the post-op or post-injury period of the first few days. I found my greatest friends were ice and painkillers. The only way is to get as much help as possible and guts it out until the initial pain subsides. This takes about 2-3 days.

Once I was at home, I had to do post-op exercises in my rest phase. It's really called 'Active Rest' as the rest is to let the body heal—and the body certainly needs that. However you also need to be active and transition from the Rest phase to the Recovery phase.

RECOVERY

Post-op exercises start from the first day. By no means are you trying to walk around the house, but you CANNOT be lazy and sit on the sofa all day. You will actually deteriorate if you do this.

I continued my ice multiple times a day and prescribed painkillers, as well as doing my Physio range of movement and muscle activation exercises—religiously. Knowing how important they were prompted me to make sure I did them. But for all the patients out there, you need to realise that every little bit of exercise and ice, stretching and whatever other things that you are told to do—is for a reason.

The more you do the better and faster the result you will get. It's a crucial time for you body, especially in my case—to get muscles back working quickly.

You need to be seeing your Physio as soon as possible in the recovery phase. For me—I saw my colleague within 4 days of surgery, who actually witnessed the surgery as well so had first hand knowledge of what I went through. Even people like me need guidance and a reality check on where they are and what they need to do. Your Physio also acts as a 'whip-cracker' to motivate you if you're a bit behind and instruct you on your rehab timeline and were need to be, as well as pulling in the reins a bit if you're doing too much!

Again, my experience of exactly how much effort I had to put in and the re-organisation of my day to day life was a real eye-opener. Doing my exercises, although initially painful due to the tightness of my muscles and joints, and the swelling in my knee was actually relieving. The more I did—the better I got. It's really difficult to do something that hurts but actually makes you better in the long run as it's hard to see the end result there and then. The recovery phase lasts about 2 weeks until you are able to walk reasonably well and you can focus on the last part— the rehab phase.

REHAB

All phases are just as important as each other, but the Rehab phase is the longest and the hardest to keep up. As our pain reduces we tend to forget about it, and as our function improves and we can do more in our lives—the less we think about our injury and inevitably forget to do our exercises! I can totally relate to this as this happened to me at one point. However once again I can't stress to you all enough how consistent you need to be in rehabilitation. In most cases, you need to be doing some sort of rehab routine every day. Whether it's simple exercises to intensive strengthening, every little bit counts and keeps you on track. Doing rehab also stops you slowing down and what Physio's call 'yo-yo-ing' from good to bad. If you are always getting better then worse (from not doing homework or getting treatment) then you end up getting nowhere, and you plateau. If your progress halts then you will feel as though you are not getting better and the treatment or rehab is not working for you. Then you give up. Don't let this happen to you!

Take my advice, the more you do and the more consistent you are with every phase, the better. Seeing your Physio will stop you falling off the band wagon as well as making sure you don't do anything unsafe or re-injure yourself. It's a hard road and trust me, from being a patient myself I know how you feel. But stick to the treatment plan and the rehab program—it's so worth it. ■