

ACUTE SPORTS INJURIES: THE 3 ESSENTIAL STEPS



Tim Keeley, B.Phty, Cred.MDT, APA

Principal Physiotherapist | Director

Tim has over 11 years experience in Physiotherapy and the Fitness Industries. He is also a rehabilitation expert, clinical educator and convention presenter. He is the Director of Physio Fitness Australia operating 4 clinics across Sydney.

For more information go to www.physiofitness.com.au or call 1300 233 300.

I have recently experienced first hand that what seems like a simple sprain, can be so much more. It has reinforced to me personally that following 3 simple but absolutely essential steps can make a massive difference to the recovery and the long term outcome of an acute sports injury.

My fiancée and I together with a group of friends were skiing in New Zealand for our annual ski trip. It had just dumped 30cm of fresh new powder at Treble Cone in Wanaka, and we were having a ball - as all skiers and boarders would appreciate (and envy!) However it was a not-so-glorious day for my knee. Skiing down the mountain I attempted to do a 360 skiing trick off the side of a trail. I landed it, however my ski was caught in the snow and my body twisted away, wrenching my knee in the process. The pain was intense and the worst I have ever felt. I lay there yelling for about 5 minutes. The adrenaline kicked in, the pain subsided a bit, my friends came to the rescue and I actually managed to ski down to the bottom of the mountain. Not knowing it, but at this point I had ruptured my Anterior Cruciate Ligament and split the medial meniscus in my knee. Being a Physio for over 11 years I had a suspicion of what had done (but was in denial), however I knew exactly what to do straight away to stop an acute sports injury becoming an absolute nightmare.

By following the 3 essential steps, within 7 days I was walking well, had no real swelling nor pain, near-normal movement and was being looked after by Physio's, Doctors and Specialists. For a significant knee injury - that's amazing.

Step 1: Always treat injuries immediately with the R.I.C.E. principle for 24-72 hours (This is the most important step!)



I immediately lay down in the restaurant with my leg elevated, whilst my fiancée went to the bar and got some ice. I iced my knee for 30 minutes, which helped reduce the pain significantly. After that I immediately applied compression with a 'tubigrip' stocking from the medical centre at the ski resort.

What this immediate action meant is that my knee hardly swelled, I controlled my pain and I was able to drive home. I continued icing my knee for 30minutes every 2-3 hours for the rest of the day and the next morning. This in turn also meant I was functional for the next day, able to walk to the Physio and my muscles did not 'deactivate' too much, as well as setting me up to be able to go to work 2 days later.

Step 2: Get the injury professionally assessed and acute treatment straight away

At the ski resort I saw the on-site Doctor who assessed my knee. She said I had most likely torn my ACL and referred me straight to Physio for a further assessment and treatment. She also gave me a script for medications that I may need to control the pain. The next day I went directly to the Queenstown Physio who managed to fit me in. Again, confirming the diagnosis of a ACL rupture. They treated it, making it feel even better and improved my walking and confidence. The Physio gave me specific muscle and range of movement exercises to keep my knee working and to stop my problem getting worse. Doing these exercises enabled me to get around, reduce the pain, drive the car and return to work. The Physio also highly recommended that I get a referral from my Doctor back in Sydney for an MRI scan as soon as I got back. I followed his advice, seeing my Doctor and getting a referral for a MRI Scan and to see a specialist.



The result of the scan (pictured) shows a complete tear of the ACL, as well as a medical meniscal tear. Being a Physio—it's my worst nightmare. I have treated and rehabilitation hundreds of people with the same problem, and know that surgery is involved and what the rehab is like and the time it takes.

Step 3: Start your Physiotherapy Rehab program as soon as possible and follow specialist advice

When I was back in Sydney 2 days later I saw my Physio colleague Susan at our Bondi Junction clinic who started me on an immediate exercise rehab program specific to my injury, whilst I wait for my scheduled Surgeon's appointment (which was organised straight away by my Doctor to avoid delay). Each day I went to Physio my knee improved every session, reducing my pain and preventing my knee becoming worse through loss of muscle control and strength. I then saw a knee specialist (Orthopaedic Surgeon), for expert advice and surgical management of my knee.

If I did not do these 3 essential steps I would be in a very bad position with a terribly painful knee and a very long road back to recovery. I am now booked in for the latest ACL "LARS" reconstructive surgery next week. This new type of ACL surgery can only be done in the first 5-6 weeks following injury. If I did not take the 3 essential steps, right through to making sure I saw the specialist, this would not have been possible. ■