

The Injury & Recovery Cycle

Injuries only occur when you increase the load on part of your body faster than you can adapt. The load can be sudden (i.e., twisting an ankle) or occur slowly over a long period of time (i.e., bad posture and running form wearing out your knee). Most running injuries result from pushing too hard, too soon. *Listen to your body!* It takes a while to adapt to longer distances and/or higher speeds. When you spend too much time outside of your "happy zone", the chances of injury increase.

Both acute and chronic injuries usually occur at the weakest link, so the real problem might not be where the pain is. Even relatively minor injuries, if not resolved, can then cause changes and compensations in your posture and form that can overload and injure other areas of your body.

Recovery: Most injuries heal more quickly and completely under load (not rest). Immobilizing the hurt area leads to stiffening of the joint, reduces blood and lymphatic flow, and causes the fascial layers between and around the muscle fibers to essentially "glue" things together. I ended up getting a frozen shoulder after a minor surgery because the doctor told me to keep my arm in a sling for 3 weeks! On the other hand, doing too much too soon also isn't wise!

Movement is one of the best ways to help an injury heal. Mobilize the area as soon as possible, slowly return to weight-bearing exercise, start walking as soon as possible, and then add short intervals of easy running. While rehabbing, make sure you use proper form, to avoid developing compensatory inefficient movement patterns. Sharp pain should be avoided, but soreness isn't necessarily bad. A steady progression back to full activity will help the tissue to heal in a more functional way.

Treating Your Injuries: Working out muscle spasms and loosening tight fascia also can help healing. Use a foam roller, rolling pin, ball, and/or a Theracane to push into any tight, sore areas and move in a way that pulls into the pain. You can choose your level of discomfort- more frequent, lower pressure yields almost the same result as deep pressure (though discomfort is necessary to make any real change). The pain should start to ease within a minute or so- if the pain ever starts to get worse, stop immediately, since you are probably doing something wrong! If this happens, don't give up, but find a myofascial release therapist to help.

There is some evidence that anti-inflammatory drugs may slow healing, either through direct inhibition of the healing cycle (inflammation IS healing!) or by masking the pain signals that are there to stop you from over-doing it. I personally use NSAIDS only at night if they help me sleep.

Heal Your Body With Your Brain: Research into neuro-plasticity shows how the brain can essentially change the "volume" of pain signals and learn ways of moving efficiently even after serious injury. I've had good luck with reframing my "injuries" as not being serious (unless proven otherwise!), and try to take a childlike curious approach to my running. I've recovered quickly from foot, knee, and back pain where MRIs showed damage- usually by trying to have a playful, exploratory attitude while I run at an easy pace. Running on remote trails seems to be where most of my rehab occurs, not because of the "healing power of nature" (though it can't hurt!), but because every step is a little bit different, and its so much more fun than running on the road! Fear inhibits healing and leads to unnatural cautionary movement patterns that can limit return to full function.

Note: One preventable cause of injury is **over-striding**. When your foot hits the ground too far in front of your body (causing sudden braking), an impact spike travels through your ankle, knee, hip, & back. By increasing your cadence (steps/min), you shorten your stride and reduce this impact.



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