

Return – To – Play

Many times after sustaining a serious injury, athletes will want to do whatever it takes to return to the playing field. They see professional athletes making miraculous comebacks in short periods of time, and they try to do the same. But one must keep in mind that if you return too early, there is a risk of re-injury, and the second down time may end up being longer. Remember, professional athletes are usually in tremendous physical condition at the time of their injury, and are highly motivated. There is a proper way to go about returning to full activity after an injury, and there are certain exercises that can be done to help strengthen the involved area.

It is essential that a rehabilitation program be specially tailored to address different injuries and situations.

Prompt Treatment - as soon as an injury occurs, make sure that you are examined by a professional as soon as possible. The more timely the diagnosis the faster treatment can be rendered. Treatment may consist of immobilization, rest, further diagnostic testing, rehabilitation or possibly surgery.

Positive Attitude - it is always helpful to have a positive outlook on what is in store for you – this will benefit you during your “down” time and you will strive to recover faster. Do not take a positive attitude to the point where you think you are ready to play when you are still not fully healed, however.

Stay fit - if you are in good shape, when an injury occurs it may not be quite as severe. Also, you must keep yourself in shape even while you are injured, so that you will be ready to play when the injury is fully healed.

In the acute phase, effective ways to help your recovery time are focused on minimizing swelling – using ice, compression and elevation, as well as plenty of rest and less strenuous activities. Activities that can be used to maintain condition during recovery period depend on the injury – for instance, a leg injury may require running in water or using a stationary bicycle. Never wait until you are fully healed to start getting back in shape. After strength returns to normal, simple and effective drills can be started to return you to your former level of ability. Starting a light jogging program for lower extremity injuries and light throwing for upper extremity injuries may be a conservative way to begin returning to your sport. .

Following a carefully formulated treatment plan leading to full recovery not only lessens the chance of re-injury, but also assures that when you do return you will be prepared to meet the demands of your sport. Each injury is different and therefore the treatment and the period of time to return to play varies. The main concern of your orthopedist is that you are fully recovered before you return – even at 70% you may feel like you are ready

to play again, but serious risks may remain. As team physicians, we are always trying to get the athlete back as soon as possible, but health and safety should always come first.