



# STAY HEALTHY WITH MIND POWER

## Physically Speaking

February 2007

Injury is one of the most challenging physical and mental demands that players face as part of their job. From the moment an injury occurs, your mental response or **MIND POWER** is tested. How professionally you pass these mental tests determines how quickly and vigorously you recover.

**Less mentally tough players** tend to spend excess time experiencing non-useful thoughts and emotions, for example, they:

- Feel sorry for themselves
- Become angry
- Deny what happened
- Hide and worsen their injury
- Only thinking, without taking action

**Mentally tough players** acknowledge, accept and understand what has happened...and take committed, intelligent, planned and supported steps on the pathway to recovery. (Read the Physically Speaking topic, "*Your Health, Your Actions*").

Read on to find out more about why injuries occur and what mental steps **you** can take to prevent injuries and stay healthy.



All Tennis and Sport Photos: Getty Images

### GETTING INJURED IS BOTH A MENTAL AND PHYSICAL PROCESS

You'd be surprised by the number of factors that can play a role in injury, other than physical and environmental ones such as the "nasty slip" or "repetitive load". Your personality as a player, the quality of your support team, and how you handle things mentally also play key roles:

**PHYSICAL:** Your physical fitness (strength, stamina, speed) with your flexibility, core stability, and muscle balance are key factors that can either prevent or promote injuries. Your diet, quality of sleep and level of fatigue also influence your risk of injury. If any one of these physical factors are not 100% healthy, your risk of injury and illness naturally increases.

**ENVIRONMENT:** The quality of your footwear, the surface on which you play and train, and the prevailing weather conditions also influence whether you will develop an injury. You must pay appropriate attention to these.

**"HIDDEN" PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS:** You may not be aware that there are many psychological and social pressures, expectations and stressors that secretly work against you. Research indicates that increased daily life stress leads to greater the risk of injury and/or illness. When life events cause you worry, this will affect your tennis performance. Further, when training expectations of yourself or a coach are excessive, then the onset of injury is more likely. In matches, you may begin to find that your attention wanders, your anxiety increases and so the tension in your working muscles increases. This high muscle tension and lack of concentration further increase the risk of injury.

**Hassles in your life off the court contribute to injury on court!**

### THE STRESS-INJURY "TRAPS" IN TENNIS

To stay healthy and on court, players need to be careful not to fall into some of these common psychological "traps" where the stress you place on yourself makes injury more likely:

**"I MUST PLAY THROUGH THE PAIN":** The player believes that it is normal to play through an injury, but in doing so makes the injury worse and recovery period longer.

**"IT IS A SHORT CAREER":** Professional tennis careers are short compared with regular jobs, so players push themselves to achieve much in a short period of time, often taking excessive risks that actually compromise their health and career success.

**"OTHER PLAYERS DO IT":** Younger, less physically mature players tend to model or copy older players who often follow the previous ideas. Due to their vulnerable growing bodies, young players risk even more long-term damage and may sustain irreversible physical harm.

**"PRESSURE TO PLEASE OTHERS":** Players feel direct or indirect pressure from coaches, parents and others who intentionally, accidentally, or ignorantly create an environment which influences players to hide or play through injuries. Players often take risks and potentially over-train to get approval or avoid disapproval from others. This increases the chance of injury.

**"NOT LISTENING TO THOSE WHO SUPPORT ME":** Listen to, discuss your injury with and be guided by your qualified medical advisors and treating therapists. Ignoring their advice may cause delayed or incomplete healing. Trusted family and friends can also provide invaluable extra support and can help your recovery. Allow others to help you through the healing process.





# STAY HEALTHY WITH MIND POWER

## Physically Speaking

### CONNECT YOUR MIND AND YOUR BODY

#### IT IS UP TO YOU!

While there are some reasons outside of your control which cause injuries, many **are within your control**. If you take appropriate preventative steps you can achieve consistently long periods of health in your career.

**Be responsible for yourself and take control of injury prevention. Apply these ideas and techniques TODAY!**

***“Insanity is continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”***  
**Albert Einstein**



**THE DEDICATED PROGRAM:** Ensure that you have a dedicated injury prevention element to your physical training program and have knowledge of the specific exercises (e.g., core stability; muscle balance work) that are crucial for YOU to minimize injury.

#### GOALS—NAMED, AIMED, AND GAINED:

- To motivate you through important physical training sessions, state your goals (i.e., **name** them) at the start of the session or exercise.
- Make sure that these are challenging, realistic and that they target good technique (i.e., well **aimed**—process goals).
- Then **‘gain** them’ by working maximally to achieve each one of them through the session. The sense of achievement you gain by ticking each one off through the session will keep you motivated, focused and, most importantly, in better shape to prevent injuries occurring. (Read the Physically Speaking topic, *Set Goals for Success* for more information.)
- This mental process of goal setting should be the staple diet for each session of achievement.

**THE “LOG OF YOU”:** It is important that you know your limits and recognize when you may be getting sick, are under stress, or feel excessive fatigue. Keeping a **“Log of You”** helps detect physical and mental stress **BEFORE** you get sick or injured.

- You need to find the balance between challenging yourself versus overtraining.
- Overtraining can reduce your recovery and increase your risk of injury. (Read the Physically Speaking topics *Rest and Rally* and *Fight Fatigue* for more information.)
- To ↑ your self-awareness, self-confidence and ensure you train appropriately, keep a daily training diary.
- Ask the Primary Health Care Providers (PHCPs) for a Sport Sciences and Medicine tennis training diary.
- Your diary or **“Log of You”** notes your physical exertions, plus daily ratings of your sleep quality, mood, diet, fatigue/recovery, illness, sense of achievement, perceptions of challenge versus strain, and life stress/hassles.
- Over a few weeks, you can “do the math” and see what that time period has been like for you.
- This increasing self-awareness may help you optimize your program, detect your stressors and prevent illness or injury that might have occurred if you hadn’t been vigilant with yourself!
- You can also use this log book to set challenging goals for yourself on a week by week basis.



#### ONLY SUPPORTIVE TEAM MEMBERS ALLOWED:

- Social support from family, friends, coaches and staff is fundamental to prevent and recover from injury.
- Seek support from those who have **YOUR best interests at heart** (as opposed to theirs).
- You may place high expectations on yourself, but pressurized expectations from others is a good recipe for injury and very unhealthy for your career.
- Acknowledge those on your team who are unconditionally there for you. It is these people you need to:
  - 1) Go to when you need emotional support and advice.
  - 2) Think about when you feel any stress or pressure to make a decision that may not serve you well (e.g., training with an injury). What would they say and what advice or support would they give you?

**IT’S GOOD TO TALK! EDUCATE YOUR TEAM:** Your people are not mind readers!

- Sometimes members of your support team can be ignorant of the pressure or stress that they place upon you.
- To take control of the situation, communicate your feelings openly.
- **If you are serious about staying healthy and minimizing your injury risk, everybody needs to be on the same page!**
- So, **TALK** to your coach and team about the work you want to do, the goals you want to reach, and the best way they can support you. This will help you reach your potential without excessive pressure.
- Agree upon the expectations, role and responsibilities for yourself, your coach and support team.
- This agreement is an essential step to maximize your tennis performance and minimize your risk of injury.

The information provided within this Physically Speaking topic is for informational purposes only and should not be treated as medical, psychiatric, psychological, health care or health management advice. If you have any health or related questions or concerns, please contact your medical advisor. Copyright © WTA Tour, Inc. 2011, All Rights Reserved.

Thanks to Dr. Chris Harwood,  
Sport Psychologist, WTA Player  
Development Advisory Panel