



YOUR HEALTH, YOUR ACTIONS

Physically Speaking

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Injuries happen to all professional athletes at some point in their careers. Any injury has physical, emotional, social and economic costs for the injured player and for the tennis entertainment business. The 2004 Ten Year Age Eligibility and Player Development Review indicated the significance of injuries. Respondents across all categories (players, the tennis and sport sciences and medicine communities) cited injuries as the number one stressor. With so much at stake, athletes may feel significant personal pressure and may be externally pressured by others to recover quickly and return to competition.

Why do some players respond to an injury with an increase in optimism and effort when others struggle with negative thoughts and emotions or fail to follow the recommended treatment program? The answer lies in the mind and characteristics of the athlete.



All Tennis and Sport
Photos: Getty Images

MIND POWER



When an injury occurs, every player experiences cognitive (thoughts) and emotional (feelings) responses. These thoughts and feelings are influenced by the player's beliefs, which may or may not be true, about her situation. What the athlete thinks and feels influences her actions and behavior during her treatment and recovery.

- **THOUGHTS:** Initial thoughts are often negative and focus on "Why me?"
 - ➔ Persistent negative thoughts tend to distract the player from the tasks she needs to complete for her recovery (e.g. attending therapy, doing her exercises).
- **EMOTIONS:** It is normal for injured athletes to experience a wide range of emotions, including:
 - ➔ Fear ➔ Anger ➔ Depression ➔ Anxiety ➔ Denial ➔ Frustration ➔ Confusion ➔ Helplessness
- The severity of the injury, timing in the season, chance and length of time off all affect the player's emotional response. The more serious the injury, the greater the chance of negative feelings.
- Continual negative feelings are unhelpful. They disrupt therapy and slow down the recovery process.
- Under the pressure of an injury situation, players often attempt to reduce their fears and stress in ways that are habitual and come automatically to them.
- Sometimes these characteristics or habits help the recovery from injury; sometimes they do not.
- Players can use the helpful aspects and manage the less helpful ones to enhance their recovery and healing.

"Adversity causes some people to break and others to break records."

William A Ward, Scholar

HANG IN THERE!

Recovery from injury is an ongoing process that the player can influence with her actions.

An ability to persevere, even when the treatment is difficult or painful, to be optimistic about the ultimate outcome and to be self-confident are characteristics that improve an athlete's chances of making a successful recovery.

Any player can work on the following characteristics to ↑ her chances of a good recovery:

COMPETENCE = the knowledge that an activity can be successfully performed.

CONTROL = the ability to control aspects of the tasks involved in the rehabilitation.

COMMITMENT = willingness to stick with the rehabilitation activities through to completion.

Take responsibility for your health and become an active participant in your healing journey.

Make sure you practice **Champion Recovery Characteristics** next time you are injured.





CHAMPION RECOVERY CHARACTERISTICS

ONE—COMPETENCE

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: Understanding what is happening to your injured body is important to allow you to be involved in the decisions that affect your health.

- Questions you should ask include How serious is the injury? What will I need to do to return to tennis? How long will my recovery take? What exercises can I do to help? What about pain, how much should I expect? How is my progress going to be measured? What mental strategies can I use to help my recovery? Is it normal for the progress to be up and down/faster at the start, slower towards the end? When is it safe and smart for me to return to play?
- Accept that you have ultimate responsibility for the rehabilitation, and there is much you can do to increase your chances of a good recovery.

YOU CAN DO IT! Positive beliefs and expectations and an optimistic attitude will help you recuperate.

- Your doctor, Primary Health Care Provider (PHCP) and therapist will work with you to provide a program that helps to:
 - ➔ Decrease the pain and discomfort of the injury.
 - ➔ Gradually ↑ the intensity, so you succeed at each step on the rehabilitation pathway.
 - ➔ Set realistic goals with you to measure your progress.
 - ➔ Provide you with encouragement and support for your efforts.
 - ➔ Explain possible setbacks and help you manage them when they occur.



“The first wealth is health”. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lecturer, Poet

TWO--CONTROL



REFRAME: Denying any negative thoughts and feelings that arise is not helpful for your recovery. It is better to reframe them into a more positive view:

- It is normal to be upset about an injury; use this energy to motivate you to do your exercises.
- Injuries happen; this is an opportunity to get even stronger and return to play better than before.
- Use this time to safely work on technical, biomechanical or equipment aspects in your game that may be related to why you sustained the injury (e.g. review your grip; consider orthotics).
- Remember, most injuries are neither permanent nor career-ending.

MENTAL TRAINING: Use mental strategies to cope with the discomfort and challenges of the injury.

- Try relaxation strategies; imagery; thought stopping to control unhelpful negative thoughts; distraction techniques like listening to music, reading, painting or participating in a safe form of alternative exercise.
- This is a great time to work on your performance imagery to keep your on-court skills sharp as you rehabilitate. (Read the Physically Speaking topics *Visualize Victory* and *Relaxation*, for more information.)
- Seek professional guidance if you need to improve your mental skills. The PHCPs can assist you to find a suitable practitioner.

THREE--COMMITMENT

These factors will help you stay motivated and to stick with your rehabilitation program:

SOCIAL SUPPORT:

- Surround yourself with supportive, positive people who will encourage your progress and allow you to make your own informed decisions.
- Avoid people who pity you or are overprotective; this kind of support will hinder your recovery.
- Talk to players who have successfully come back from injuries, they remind you it can be done.
- Get involved in something outside of tennis—enroll in a course; increase your charity work, or take up a hobby.
- Participating in these kinds of activities helps you remain positive and motivated during your rehabilitation.

SET GOALS:

- Be involved in setting difficult, but achievable realistic short- and long-term goals for your recovery.
- Goals help direct you towards a healthy return to the court and allow you a method to measure your progress. (Read the Physically Speaking topic *Set Goals for Success*, for more information.)

ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE:

- No one wants an injury. Next time one happens to you, view it as a challenge: an opportunity to accept responsibility, commit to rehabilitation and apply these tips. You can reap the rewards and be back on court faster and stronger.

