

Injured Athletes Rehabilitation Program.

Rehabilitating the injury in Three Phases.

- **Phase One. Base-building.** The goal of phase one is to establish a base of at least three workouts a week, without increasing pain during or between workouts. Rather, as workouts in the base regimen are repeated, there should be a gradual diminishing of pain from workout to workout, or week to week.
 - At this base level, workout frequency, pace, and duration should depend entirely on what the injury/pain allows, from, say, daily 5-minute walks at a very-slow pace to several 30-minute workouts per week at a slow pace.
 - The key is to never allow the pain to rise above the tender level during a workout and, similarly, never allow the pain between workouts to increase as well.
 - The sole purpose of the workouts is to warm up, loosen up, and increase circulation in the injured area, and thereby eventually restore its normal function and pain-free condition.
 - A week at this level is barely long enough to confirm a sustainable base of non-injurious workouts; the injury may still be there, but you aren't making it worse.
 - And hopefully, it will have gotten significantly better during this initial, base-building process.
- **Phase Two. Transitioning to Normal Fitness Training.** Starting with the recently established rehabilitation regimen, there should be a gradual, incremental increase in workout pace and/or duration, as injury pain subsides.
 - It should be clear, however, that increased effort is not the same as a return to "training." You are still in rehabilitation mode until you have completed phase three below.
 - Phase two is a transition phase between building a sustainable base (in phase 1) and progressing to a normal, injury-free training load (in phase three).
 - Phase two is still part of the gradual, incremental rehabilitation process as opposed to actual "training." And pain—not a tentative schedule—is the final arbiter of when and how to increase pace or duration.
 - The key is to never increase the workout load unless you are 80-90% sure the current rehab regimen isn't threatened by a sudden return to debilitating injury.
 - Remember, your energy will probably run ahead of your ability to ward off renewed injury. It will feel so good to pick up the pace, with no sense of discomfort, even from the injury. Then suddenly pain returns.
 - This sort of scenario should be avoided at all cost, including a slightly later full recovery. The return to normal training will more effectively occur in a much more structured manner during phase three.

- **Phase Three. Return to Fitness.** This phase is comparable to the adaptive phase of the training cycle (shock, adaptation, and exhaustion), as opposed to the shock phase which has been active until now.
 - The athlete has established a normal training regimen at the passable level of proficiency in phase two.
 - In phase three, he/she feels progressively more injury-free and able to train at his/her usual fitness level.
 - The key is to settle for a while at the effectively-able level in order to allow the body time to adapt to the training load—but more importantly—to continue reducing the feeling of vulnerability to renewed injury.
 - In other words, resist the urgent desire to get back to the way training was before the injury. It could be that it was too hard, anyway, and objective reassessment of the training load is necessary.

Finding and Solving the Injury Problem. Training issues can cause injuries. But there could be other problems. Shoes, for instance, can be a major cause of recurring injuries. Worn or compressed heels, improper sizing, and incorrect matching of a shoe-maker's intended function with the athlete's bone and muscle structure—all can lead to injuries. Find expert advice before you invest in a new pair of shoes. But don't hesitate to cover the new-shoe base as one of your first steps in the rehabilitation process.

Changing Injury-related Attitudes. Thinking: I'm a bad person; this is the end of my running career; I'm so depressed. These are all unnecessary and counter-productive mental/emotional aspects of the injury phenomenon. You are ultimately responsible for dealing with the injury in such a way that you return to enjoyable, injury-free training—your natural way of being. Everything else should be rooted out, along with unbridled ambition. My wife used to wag a finger at my injured athletes and say, "All injuries are rooted in ambition." She was right, of course, but only the bravest athletes are willing to examine their deep-seated motivations.