

## **How much is too much? What should I be focussed on with physio exercises?**

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A new bush season has arrived and with this may come an array of accidents and injuries that, if we sat at home and read the paper, would not happen. If you are unfortunate to succumb to some affliction then your physio could become your best friend. Even so the question asked this month is how do you know if you are over doing your exercises, what should you expect from your exercises and what are you aiming to achieve? I will try to explain what physio should do and how you can be sure you are on the right road to recovery.

It is really crucial that on your first visit to the physio that you give a full and accurate history of what happened to cause your injury or, if not an acute injury, then how it has progressed. This history and initial examination will be the information that the physio will base your treatment programme on so it is vital to get this right. Mechanism of injury can really help us with an accurate diagnosis and can get you on the recovery road faster. Examination will include looking at many aspects such as swelling, redness, bruising, tenderness, range of movement, ligament stability, muscle power, sensation, function, balance, gait. Your verbal history of pain and any medications taken is vital too as that gives information on the severity of the injury or complaint. With all this information the physio will then formulate a treatment plan. This should be discussed with you so you have an idea of what you have done and how long your injury should last.

With an acute injury there may very well be a lot of swelling. Swelling is the inflammatory response that happens as the body reacts to the injury and is due to increased movement of fluid and white blood cells into the area. It can be edema which is outside a joint capsule or an effusion which is inside the joint capsule. This can make diagnosis difficult as the swelling can mask what is actually going on deep inside. Often x-rays or scans done at this stage do not even give a clear picture. So the initial physio treatment is to try to reduce that swelling and also to protect the joint from further damage until it can be properly diagnosed. Your advice will be probably to elevate the swollen area,

keep it compressed and protected- you may be given a brace or have some strapping applied for support and possible some very gentle exercises – these will be to try to increase the circulation to the area to promote the healing process and reduce the swelling and to try to prevent stiffness. Stick to that advice carefully- your reaction to the advice given will give the physio information with which to plan the next stage of your treatment. If you have not followed the advice then your treatment might not be appropriate.

After the initial phase the rest of your treatment will be a progression of working at getting back your range of movement, strength, flexibility. This will be a carefully graduated programme which will be tailored to your needs. When you are doing your exercises you must stick exactly to what has been prescribed- it will have been worked out especially for you and the number of repetitions will have been worked out too. So please do not change this – you may cause damage that will hamper your recovery and keep you out of the bush for even longer! If you haven't done any exercises then you must also confess- we would rather know than just think that the exercises were not being effective. You might get a small telling off but better to be honest! Do ask lots of questions. Quiz your physio on what the exercises are for, what to expect to feel, what the aim of each particular exercise is, so that you know exactly why you are doing the exercise and why you are doing a particular amount. Each exercise you have been given will have a purpose depending on the stage of your recovery, and you need to attain certain goals before you can progress. Progress too early and you may have to step back. If you feel you could be doing more, then talk to your physio about this – you may be progressing faster than expected and may be able to progress, but do ask rather than just cranking up the repetitions.

There are certain things to watch for when you are doing exercises which can indicate that all is not right. If you experience any pain, any increase in swelling, bruising, redness, you become stiffer or lose your range of movement, or you have any altered sensation i.e. tingling, pins and needles or numbness, then stop the exercises immediately and get in touch with the physio. Everyone responds differently so occasionally there is an unexpected reaction.