

## Relaxation and Imagery for Injury Recovery

One useful technique to help you recover faster and more completely from injury is **relaxation**. The technique of progressive **relaxation** was developed to help hospital patients recover faster from their injuries by relaxing muscles that they didn't even know were tense.

Athletes usually have a good awareness of muscle tension, but injuries can cause extra unnecessary muscle tension. By focusing on the **relaxation** of your tense muscles, recovery from injury is facilitated. Also, your blood pressure, hormones, respiratory system and immune systems relax with the rest of your body, so they are ready to help you recover.

### Relaxation Techniques:

1. Progressive Relaxation (gradually tense and then relax all of the muscles in your body from your toes to your head).
2. Relaxation Line (visualize a line moving slowing up your body from your toes to your head, relaxing your body as it travels along).
3. Relaxation Ball (visualize a ball of relaxing energy above your stomach that enters your body and slowly spreads to all parts of your body, relaxing all of your muscles).

**Visualization** is another method you can use to help you recover faster from injury. Scientific evidence has shown that mentally **visualizing** something can result in actual responses from your body, even if no visible movement occurs. By focusing on specific areas of your body, you can actually help yourself recover.

### Visualization Techniques:

1. Visualize your body physically healing your injury:
  - a. Imagine little robots putting your muscle back together, an army of white blood cells attaching an illness, or small hands massaging a sore muscle.
  - b. Imagine applying a "powerful healing ointment" to your injury and feel the warm or cool feeling of this ointment as it penetrates deep to heal the injury.
  - c. Visualize your therapy exercises making your muscles or tendons stronger.
  - d. Visualize the ice making the swelling of your injury go down.
2. Visualize yourself gradually getting stronger and improving your skills.
3. See yourself positively managing your stress and all of the things you have to do in your life.
4. See yourself completely healed through your hard work with your body very strong and ready to go.

Reference: York, L. (2002). *Injuries: Friend or foe? You decide!* JDS Sport Coaching. Retrieved from <http://www.jdssportcoaching.com/injuries.html> on December 2, 2003.

## Stress and Athletic Injuries → Overview

### Short Term Injuries

- ❖ Most athletes suffer some type of injury at some time during their training or competitions.
- ❖ Injuries might be minor (blister, pulled muscle, bruise, sort body part) or they might be major (tearing a ligament or muscle, breaking a bone) or anywhere in between.
- ❖ After sustaining an injury, the most important part of recovery is how you deal with the injury.

### Psychological Reactions to Injury

- 1) Stress and Anxiety – Worry about recovery (speed, completeness). Worry about re-injury and getting replaced. While waiting to practice again, there's a lot of time to worry.
- 2) Lack of Confidence – When athletes are unable to practice because of injury, they can lose confidence. Losing confidence can lead to less motivation, lower performance, or other injuries through overcompensation.
- 3) Performance Decrements – Postinjury performance declines can result from lowered confidence and missed practice time. It's hard to lower expectations after an injury, instead of trying to come back at the preinjury level of performance.

### How Can Sport Psychology Help with Injury Recovery?

- ❖ Focus on both physical and mental recovery.
- ❖ Giving emotional and social support.
- ❖ Being realistic, positive, and optimistic.
- ❖ Teaching specific coping skills (goal setting, positive self-talk, imagery, visualization, and relaxation)

### Steps to Mental and Physical Recovery From Injury

- 1) Education about the injury and the recovery process
- 2) Acceptance of injury and positive attitude to deal with it
- 3) Focus on quality mental training and physical recovery
- 4) Goal setting

*Next Time: Specific things injured athletes can do to cope and recover mentally...*

Information adapted from Weinberg, R.S. & Gould, D. (2003). *Foundations of sport & exercise psychology* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 428-441). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.