

TOP TIPS FROM OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

# 10 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INJURIES



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## Foreword

As Physical Therapists we are always on the lookout for an opportunity to educate our patients. We are continually arming them with the best information we have in order to help them recover from their injuries, prevent further or repeated injuries, and get back to their regular activities as quickly as possible.

It is of no surprise that we often find ourselves giving the same educational information over and over and over again. We end up sharing many of the same tips to each of our patients because we know there are specific tidbits of info that are incredibly helpful and can make huge differences to nearly everyone we see. What if you didn't need to get injured and walk through our door to get this information? What if we could wrap up all of our most valuable tips and give them to you as one big free gift to you? Well we have done just that! Our Physical Therapists have gathered up the most common and valuable information we have and boxed it all up into the tips we are providing you below. Keep reading...

# The Top 10 Most Valuable Physiotherapy Tips

## 1) Your pain may not be coming from where you feel it.

It's easy to think that whatever is causing your pain is right below the surface of where your pain is. Not true! Well, in many cases it is true; the structure causing your pain can indeed be right under your fingers, but in many other cases you may be experiencing referred pain, that is, pain which is coming from a source somewhere else further away in the body. A classic example that most everyone is aware of is the pain of a heart attack. When someone is having a heart attack they often don't feel any pain in their chest area but rather feel it into their left arm or left jaw. That is referred pain! Another example is that shoulder pain can actually be coming from one of your many internal organs such as the liver, gall bladder, stomach, spleen or lungs. Bizarre, isn't it?

The exact mechanism of referred pain is still not perfectly defined but the likely explanation, in simple terms, is that some of the nerves from the different areas in

the body come in close contact to one another in the spinal cord. As they do so,

stimulation to the nerves ‘overflows’ and affects the other nerves that are nearby, hence the pain sensation in another area of the body.

Pain can also radiate, which is different than true referred pain. For example, someone might feel tingling, numbness, or an achy pain in their lower leg or foot, but this leg pain is actually coming from an issue at their lower back (even though they may not feel anything in their back at all)! In patients with this symptom there is some structure in the lower back that is pressing on the nerves that come out of the lower back. The nerves travel down the leg and into the foot so the patient can feel the pain wherever the nerve goes to. This is called radiating pain.

## 2) Did you know that strains and sprains are not the same?

The two terms sound so similar, but in medical terms one refers to an injury of a muscle and the other refers to injury of a ligament.

Muscles (and their tendons, which attach the muscle to the bone) are said to be **STRAINED** when injured. Ligaments, which are the tissues that attach bones to bones to keep them in place, are said to be **SPRAINED** when injured. So if your Physical Therapist says you have strained your back, they are referring to an injury to your back muscles. If you have sprained your ankle, it is the ligaments of the ankle that you have injured. Muscles and ligaments can be strained or sprained to differing degrees. You may have just slightly torn the fibers, or if you are unlucky, you may have completely torn the fibers in two! Ouch!

## 3) Gone are the days of “No pain no gain”.

The phrase “no pain, no gain” has been around for a long time, but it was never coined to be used in the Physical Therapy world. Your body is a clever unit and when it feels pain, it is trying to tell you something!

If you have injured yourself and feel pain, you need to stop and get to a Physical Therapist at Physical Therapy Now straight away so they can assess the level of damage and get you on track to a speedy recovery. Continuing to play or work through pain can just cause more damage and make for a longer recovery.

If you are already seeing a Physical Therapist for an injury and feel any pain when you are working through your exercises! Stop! Back off. In most cases your body is telling you that you have pushed things too far and you will be impeding recovery. Your Physical Therapist can advise you if there is ever a time in your recovery where you may need to feel a little discomfort in order to make a rehabilitation improvement and he or she can help you understand how pain works in the brain and body at different

stages of recovery. That way, the more you KNOW pain, the more you KNOW gain!

## 4) Both ice and heat may help your injury.

This is probably the question that comes up most for us as Physical Therapists: When to ice and when to heat?

Generally we recommend ice for any acute injury (one that has just happened). Brrrr! Yes, it's cold, but it the best treatment for approximately the first 48 hours after an injury. The ice helps to decrease the impact of both the initial injury as well as damage to any of the tissues next to the original area of injury (we call this the secondary injury), by managing excessive swelling or bleeding. You need some inflammation in the area of an acute injury to get the healing process underway, but too much can have a negative effect.

If you have suffered an acute injury then you can use heat after this first 48 hours, if you prefer it. Alternatively, you can use both ice and heat. This creates a mini pump action of the blood vessels in the area (they constrict with the ice and open with the heat) and this can help to pump any of the extra swelling in the area out of the injury site. If you choose to alternate between ice and heat, you can ice for 10-20 minutes then switch to heat for the same amount of time, depending on the size of the area you are icing.

If you are dealing with a flare up of a chronic injury, often heat is most useful instead of ice, as it increases blood flow and circulation that can move out excess inflammatory chemicals and reduce muscle spasm. For example, if you have osteoarthritic knees and they are achy from a lot of walking, you may find heat helps more than ice. The same goes for a chronic back injury that is feeling the achy effects after a bit more lifting or sitting than you normally do. Ice could do the trick too though! In many cases with chronic injuries, your body will dictate what it likes and responds to best. Listen to your body!

## 5) Gone are the days of prescribing complete bed rest -usually!

In today's fast-paced and busy world, laying on your back and doing nothing sounds

just lovely! Unfortunately, you won't likely be getting that order from any healthcare professional these days. Gone are the days of patients being directed to do nothing in order to help their injuries recover. Now to every rule, of course, there is an exception, however, bed rest as a prescription is certainly rare these days. Motion is lotion! We know for a fact that getting your muscles and joints moving helps the recovery of the tissues and makes the healing tissues stronger. Even little tiny

movements early on can help the tissues heal much more efficiently and expedite your recovery rather than doing nothing at all. How much movement, you ask? Well that highly depends on what you have injured and how badly, so check in with your Physical Therapist, pronto!

## 6) Long, slow stretches for warming up are a thing from the past.

STRRRRETCH! Now hold! Hold, hold, hold, hold, hold! How many times have you heard that over the years of warming up for your activities? Interestingly, the newest research has clearly shown time and time again that these long-duration type stretches (static stretches) can actually be detrimental to the muscles and tendons when using them for a warm up prior to engaging in an activity! This means you are actually more likely to injure yourself once you start to do your activity if you have used these types of stretches when warming up. These types of stretches can safely and effectively be used after your activity, however, in order to cool the muscles down and/or gain some flexibility.

So how should you warm up your muscles instead then? Progressively quicker and larger movements of your limbs (dynamic stretches) have been proven to warm up your muscles and tendons and prepare them for an upcoming activity. For example, you might warm up with some large arm circles or leg swings depending on what activity you are about to engage in. In addition, any actions that mimic what you are about to do are also considered useful dynamic warm up stretches. For example, if you are about to play tennis, a few quick and repeated lunges combined with reaching your arm out to simulate hitting the ball can do the trick in getting your body prepped for centre court!

## 7) Did you know that your joints need specific exercise training too?

Have you ever heard the term proprioception? It's a big word but an important one in the Physical Therapy world. Proprioception is the ability for your body to know where it is in space without you having to look at it.

Try this: stand on one foot. Do you immediately fall over? Or can you stand there for a moment or two (or longer) without toppling over? If you focus on it, can you feel your ankle making many tiny little movements to keep you balanced and standing on your one foot? That is good proprioception hard at work! In order for your body to know where your leg and foot are in space and adjust to the natural sway of your body while on just one foot, your ankle joint reacts to the input of the receptors inside the joint and then your body engages the appropriate muscles to fire and keep you

upright. There are also proprioceptive receptors in the tissues that attach to or near to your joint which add input as well.

Having good proprioception is extremely important because with most activities we do, we do them without thinking about them! When we walk, we don't think about every single step or placement of our foot on each curb. We just walk! If you step on a rock, no worries-you don't fall over! Instead your ankle and body adjust to keep you upright and moving on your way. Unfortunately, when you injure a muscle or a joint, you also *negatively affect* its proprioception. In order get back fully to the activities you were doing before your injury, you need to train your proprioception. If you have sprained your ankle, for example, that might mean simply practicing standing on one foot as your ankle recovers. Talk to your Physical Therapist; they can explain more about proprioception and get you engaging in the proper exercises to ensure your proprioception is top notch after your injury!

## 8) An injury can be building up over time with poor lifting technique.

What's the big deal with lifting technique anyways? Haven't you been lifting whichever way you want for years and never been injured? Watch out- an injury may be lurking!

Each time you lift anything that has even a bit of weight to it, it is important that you do it well. You know what we mean: bend with your knees instead of your back, hold the item in close to your body, engage/brace your tummy muscles slightly then use your legs not your back. You have likely heard it all before! But you haven't been doing it like that for all these years and you have never had an injury, right?

Unfortunately, each time you stress your back by lifting improperly, you are causing a tiny bit of stress to the tissues of your back. You may not feel it each time, but it

is happening! It is like you have a small bucket and each time you lift, you put one drop of water in the bucket. Now you may put hundreds of drops in your bucket without feeling a thing! But what happens when a full-to-the-brim bucket gets one more drop? It overflows! This happens often with our patients. We hear them say "but I was just trying to pick up the soap in the shower! How could I have injured my back this badly just from soap?" It's not the soap! It's the hundreds of times you have lifted improperly and stressed your back prior to the soap. So how do you avoid a small bar of soap causing a major injury? Lift well. Every. Single. Time. By decreasing the stress on your back every time you pick something up, you limit the strain on your back (the drops in your bucket) and avoid wearing down the tissues in your back. Your bucket may never overflow! Or it may... but hopefully much much later down the road.

## 9) Using supports and braces will not make your muscles stop working!

If a Physical Therapist had 10 cents for every time we got asked about supports and braces stopping the muscles from working... well, you know the rest!

It is a plain ol' myth that using supports and braces to assist a recovering injury or to prevent an injury from coming on will stop your muscles from working. Supports and braces are our friends! In most cases a brace or support can actually assist your muscles (and joints) to work better than they do without it. The support and our bodies work together! The right support or brace that is properly fitted can help out your injured area until you have fully recovered. Alternatively, a brace or support can help take the place of any injured tissues that aren't expected to recover fully and will forever need the added support (i.e.: a knee or ankle where you have torn a ligament completely).

By using a brace or support you may also be able to be active for longer without pain. For example if you have a chronic back injury but still need to work in a standing job, using the proper support for you back might mean you can make it through your whole shift instead of having to take the afternoon off due to an achy back.

Your Physical Therapist can advise you if a brace or support would be useful in your specific situation and can also help you locate the best one and fit for you.

## 10) Compression is as important as ice (or more!) in order to treat your injury.

Compression more important than ice? Yes! Emerging researching is hailing compression as one of the most important remedies for an acute injury, perhaps even more important than ice! By compressing an area with a wrap of some sort after an acute injury (one that has just happened) you limit the space available in the injured area for swelling to occur. Excess swelling after an injury affects how much oxygen and healing nutrients are in the area of injury, and therefore leads to a longer recovery. The area around the initial injury (secondary injury area) can also be reduced by using compression, and less secondary injury also means a quicker recovery.

Even better than compression on its own is ice and compression together. These two remedies can significantly reduce the impact of an injury on the body so be sure to have some ice and some wraps on hand whenever you are active!

Take note: if the compression is causing pain, it is too tight and you may be cutting off the circulation causing a worse injury! Don't fret. Take the wrap off and re-wrap a bit looser.

## Finale

So now you know our best kept secrets: The top 10 Physical Therapy tips that we educate our patients with. You will be miles ahead with your injury prevention and recovery by putting these tips to use!

Do you want more handy tips that are specific to you in order to help you prevent an injury or help you recover from an existing injury?

**Come on in or call and book an appointment at Physical Therapy Now with one of our highly qualified Physical Therapist.**

*They are full of useful ideas and hints to keep you active and pain-free.*

***Check us out today!***