

## Patient information

# Returning to sport post-injury: top tips for young people

This leaflet is designed to help individuals and their coaching/PE team plan a return to activity following injury and recognise where training errors may be made. It should always be used with your physiotherapist's input as different conditions behave in different ways. These are our top tips to recovery.



For the vast majority of young individuals, regular exercise is not only safe but should be encouraged. Exercise has a beneficial effect on many health outcomes and may also help improve academic performance.

### Exercise is good!

When returning from injury you may find that you are unable to complete your sport at the same level you could pre-injury. You will need to gradually work back up to previous sporting levels to avoid pain and allow your body to strengthen up.

During periods of rapid growth you are at higher risk of over-use injury and may therefore need to reduce your level of activity before building back up again.

The Australasian College of Sport and Exercise physicians recommends that the number of hours of organised sport or competition completed each week **should not total more than the athlete's age**. For example, a 10 year old should not train more than 10 hours per week across all sports (PE included).



AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF  
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Individual sports often have their own guidelines for growing athletes, for example the England and Wales Cricket Board set clear advice for children fast-bowlers.

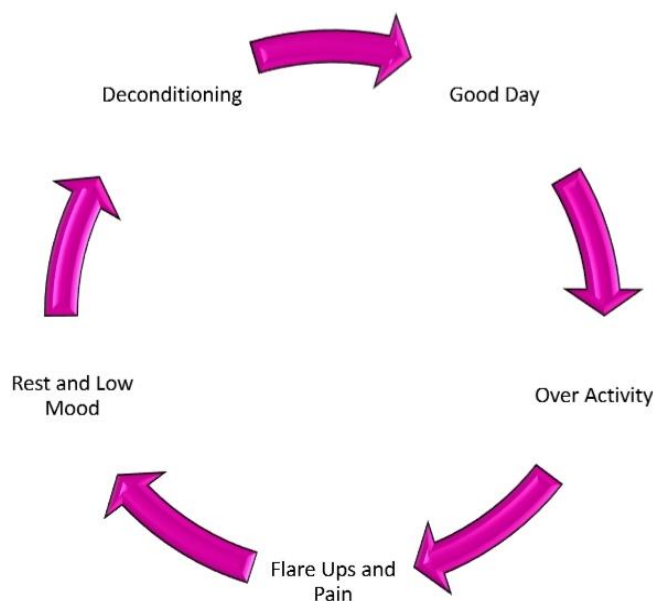
## Common training pitfalls

### Increasing activity too rapidly

Going from no sport in the summer to training and school sport in September can lead to an increase in pain. Similarly increasing your training before a competition can do more harm than good if it is done too quickly.

### Boom and bust

Doing too much when you feel better can lead to an increase in pain meaning that you are unable to do your sport for a few days afterwards. This becomes a cycle when you return to doing too much once your pain reduces again.



After injury returning to sport needs to be a gradual process, aim to make small increases each week (roughly 10% of your overall activity) and see how your body responds before increasing further. Stop at the level your body can manage **before** pain levels increase.

### Not enough rest

Rest is an important part of any training programme, it allows the body to recover. Plan rest days following harder training sessions or days with lots of activity. Make sure you include at least two rest days per week. Studies show performance actually reduces if you do not allow enough time for recovery.

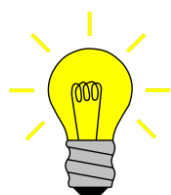
### Not spacing activity out during the week

Avoid loading one part of your week with lots of activity, see if you can spread it out across the week. Try writing down what you do on each day (including activity in and out of school) to give you an idea of when you may be doing too much. Share this information with sports coaches/PE staff.

## Not listening to pain

Muscle aches during or after sport (sometimes called DOMS) are a normal part of activity and usually a good sign that you have worked hard. However, pain in/around your joints **during** or **after** sport is usually a sign that you are overdoing your activity and need to increase your strength before increasing your activity.

As a rough guide consider pain scores of less than three out of ten to be acceptable, scores of four to be borderline and any higher to be overdoing activity (and you need to stop and rest).



### Ideas for activity modification

For each person, sport and injury behaves differently but these are some tips which other children have found helpful.

- Start by finding the level of activity which can be completed on a weekly basis without making your pain worse. This includes both during activity and within 24 hours of completing the activity.
- Any activity which is pain free can be included in this stage.
- Start with activities where you can easily control what you do and don't do, e.g cycling, swimming or running. Cross training can be beneficial for long term participation in sport.
- Start with warm up and drills rather than competitive elements, you are more likely to notice pain and stop in time.
- Return to organised sport and PE gradually, for example playing for 10 mins of a game before subbing off (you can go back on the pitch again if pain free following the first activity period). Or running for 5 minutes then walking for 2 minutes and repeating (you may be able to do more or less than these examples).
- Avoid starting back at all sporting activities in the first week, instead add a training session each week (as long as it remains pain free).
- Try to plan out your activity and increase this over the next few weeks so you can see your path to recovery.



- Expect a few bumps on the way.

## Top tips

- Avoid making big changes in a short timescale
- Expect it to be hard work to start with
- Return to the previous level which you managed pain free if you start to experience symptoms



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