

Physical therapy in healing process

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COMMENTARY

Soft tissue injuries are commonly categorized depending on a timeframe beginning with the date the injury occurred. Physical therapy programs can help make recovery after an injury easier on the body. Physical therapists are experts in the diagnosis and treatment of soft tissue injuries. They can also determine your phase of healing and the best techniques to continue the path to recovery. A soft tissue injury is termed as acute from the initial time of injury and while the pain, bleeding, and swelling is at its worst. Your body's aim at this point is to protect your injury from further damage. The usual time frame for your acute symptoms to settle is two to four days' post-injury, but this can vary depending on how you treat your injury. A soft tissue injury is termed as sub-acute when the initial acute phase makes a transition to repairing the injured tissues. This phase commonly lasts up to six weeks' post-injury when your body is busy laying down new soft tissue and reducing the need to protect your injury as the new scar tissue begins to mature and strengthen.

Your body does not magically just stop tissue healing at six-week post-injury. Healing is a continuum. At six weeks' post-soft tissue injury your healing tissue is reasonably mature but as you stretch, strengthen and stress your new scar tissue it often finds that it is not strong enough to cope with your increasing physical demand. When your body detects that a repaired structure is still weaker than necessary, it will automatically stimulate additional new tissue to help strengthen and support the healing tissue until it meets the demands of your normal exercise or physical function. The period between six weeks and three months' post-injury is commonly referred to as the remodeling phase. The final stage of tissue repair can last from 3 months up to 12 months. Scar tissue needs time to properly align and gain tensile strength needed for the forces placed on it. This phase focuses on improving the quality of the new tissue and preventing re-injury. During the first 24-72 hours of an injury, a trauma response has begun at your injured area. This can include swelling, muscle spasm, and guarding. It is during this stage that people often use painkillers

and immobilize the painful area. Physical Therapy at New Heights helps you through this phase by using the body's natural repair process. A special movement program increases blood flow to bring healing nutrients and oxygen to the injured area and takes waste products away. Gentle manual therapy reduces pain, swelling, spasms, and diminishes your chances of developing scar tissue. The regeneration phase typically lasts 6-8 weeks. During this time, your body lays down new tissue within the injured area and repairs nerve connections to damaged tissue. This is also the time when undesirable scar tissue may begin to form. During the Regeneration Phase, physical therapy is your primary method of achieving a number of benefits. The Remodeling Phase is the complete restoration of healthy function to the injured area, and may take as long as 3-12 months after your injury. Don't be fooled into thinking you are healed just because you no longer have pain.

Connective tissue heals over time. For example, the true source of a recurring spinal disc injury is often poor health of the connective tissue, and faulty spinal mechanics. The simple act of bending over to pick up a pencil can cause serious back pain. During the Remodeling Phase, we are correcting faulty spinal mechanics to achieve complete restoration of connective tissue health.

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