



“POST OPERATIVE REHABILITATION”

Post operative rehabilitation can be approached in the same way as any other musculoskeletal injury. There are however several points of consideration that patients need to be aware of:

The *extent of the initial injury* will factor into the recovery process. Often surgery is required to restore stability to a mechanical system. The surgeon may fixate two ends of a bone with screws and a plate but we often forget that there is other trauma to the surrounding tissue after an operation. In the example of a broken bone the surrounding connective tissue and musculo-tendinous units may sustain significant trauma. The trauma to this tissue may not need surgical intervention but does require rehabilitation.

For some injuries a phase of *preoperative rehabilitation* has been shown to improve outcomes postoperatively. Reconstruction of the anterior cruciate ligament, total knee joint replacement and total hip joint replacement are examples (Coudeyre et al, 2007; Shelbourne & Patel, 1995). The orthopaedic surgeon, sports physician and physiotherapist will often instruct a patient when this period of prehabilitation is appropriate.

During a surgical procedure the surgeon is often the only person in the rehabilitation team who has seen first hand the extent of the trauma and knows how stable the system is postoperatively. The *guidelines that the surgeon sets need to be followed* postoperatively to maximise recovery. Periods of immobilization and rest following surgery are some times required to provide the best possible result. Failure to adhere to these guidelines can often lead to a disappointing result or slow post operative recovery. All of the members of the rehabilitation team need to respect these guidelines.

The *effects of immobilization* on the musculoskeletal system are well documented in the literature (Shelbourne & Patel, 1995; Shaffer et al, 2000; Yasuda et al, 2005, Moseley et al, 2005; Choate, 1987). To aid the union of fractures periods of immobilization are often necessary. The consequences of immobilization are: joint stiffness, degeneration of articular cartilage, muscle atrophy, weakness and stiffness. These factors all need to be addressed by your physiotherapist and are often significant factors which may contribute to the rate of the post operative rehabilitation process.

Due to the significant effect on the whole musculoskeletal system a *graded approach to rehabilitation* needs to be taken. Guidance from your physiotherapist on a *suitable time line for recovery* and a *graded return to activity and suitable conditioning* are essential for those trying to return to any level of activity. Trying to rush the recovery from any form of surgery will lead to disappointment. Setting realistic goals with your therapist can help a lot with your recovery and expectations. Clinically we see the effects of those patients with insufficient rehabilitation and conditioning postoperatively. Examples are: the football player who returns to training without adequate rehabilitation of his knee and results in tearing his hamstring muscle or someone who undergoes a knee joint replacement and begins losing function from lack of muscle power rather than pain. More often than not we let ourselves down by our casual approach to rehabilitation and we wonder why our injuries never recover at the same rate or to the same extent as athletes with supervised rehabilitation.

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Finally, patients and therapist need to have a *realistic outcome from surgery*. For most people the part of the body which has been operated on will never be the same. While commonly we see people give up and settle for lower levels of function than they have to with post operative rehabilitation, there is also unrealistic expectation from therapists as well as patients as to the response to surgery... There is no surgery that does not have a dramatic effect on how the musculoskeletal system works.

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References available on request

For more advice on post operative rehabilitation or any other medical treatment please contact us on **0870 2000 878** or info@puresportsmed.com

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