

Ice is Better in Drinks Than On Injuries: How to handle a summertime burst of physical activity

Summer is here and it's time for fun. The last thing you want to do is put yourself on the sidelines by getting injured early in the season. **Dr. Michael Zola**, a chiropractic physician on the East Side of Providence who has been in practice over 30 years, has some tips on how to stay in the game.

Cathren Housley (Motif): Are there any unusual problems this year due to the pandemic?

Dr. Zola: Masks were important in helping to control COVID-19 transmission, but people shouldn't be doing strenuous activities with their masks on. We rebreathe the carbon dioxide that we are exhaling and when this goes back into the blood, it shifts the pH to become more acidic. This affects every other function in our bodies. People aren't protecting themselves by using masks during exercise - when we're outside in open space there is no danger of spreading COVID-19.

CH: What are the most common mistakes that people make early in the season?

Z: Going too aggressively at the beginning - if you take up where you left off last year, you're overdoing it. If you've led a sedentary life over the cold months, you really need to start again as if recovering from an injury because you are, in fact, recovering from deconditioning.

Extra weight, another common by-product of winter inactivity, can also make you more prone to injuries. There's more stress on the feet, knees and hips, and the arch of the foot is more likely to collapse.

CH: Even the most careful exercise enthusiast can get unexpected injuries. What then?

Z: First - you don't always know that you've injured yourself when you cause the actual injury. It can take a day or so before you realize that serious damage has set in.

CH: How do we tell if there's a serious problem?

Z: Look at the injury - is there rapid onset of swelling or bruising? That's when you see a medical professional. You can walk off plain old sore muscles, but if the symptoms go on, there is a problem.

CH: What is the best immediate treatment after any injury?

Z: Make sure you stay hydrated. Then, ice is good in the initial stages of an injury, but you're only going to apply it for 10 minutes at a time. This prevents cells that were injured from dying off too fast. Afterwards, soaking in Epsom salts dissolved in warm water can be very effective in promoting healing.

CH: What about getting back on track?

Z: The old way was "you get injured, you rest." Now we know that activity gets your heart pumping and the immune system circulating through your entire body. This actually helps the healing process.

CH: But what if something is torn or broken and cannot be moved at first... how do you know when to start moving, and how much?

Z: If you need emergency medical care, afterwards it's best to put yourself in the hands of a chiropractor, physical therapist or trainer.

CH: That brings up the question of soaring medical expenses. They do so many tests just figuring out what is wrong that you can end up going bankrupt from a sprained ankle.

Z: A faster and cheaper way to find out what's wrong is to see a doctor of chiropractic medicine. You can get a faster diagnosis - and get out of pain sooner.

CH: How can we manage recovery on our own?

Z: If you're ambulatory, you don't want to rest completely, but it's best to start with short intervals of activity. You are going to have to go by what your body tells you - do an activity and then see how you feel in a day or two. It can take that long to realize you've aggravated something more.

CH: What about using medication to reduce inflammation?

Z: NSAIDs such as ibuprofen and acetaminophen can inflame the GI tract and cause other serious problems. They actually delay healing by keeping inflammation down. Inflammation is a natural part of healing. Whenever there is an injury, inflammation reaches a certain point, then begins to resolve.

Pain has a purpose - it's intended to warn us when there is a problem.

CH: What else can speed healing?

Z: Lifestyle is the biggest deciding factor. You want to rebuild yourself with the best materials. When you're sedentary and eat crappy food, you are building with sub-par materials at a much slower pace.

CH: We usually don't see how that impacts our health until we're older.

Z: From about birth to 34, 35, people seem immortal. Professional athletes retire by then - they can't recover from injuries quickly enough to stay competitive. But the time to think about prevention is when you are young. Once people have decades of abuse piled on, it's much harder to change. That's why holding onto good habits in your 30s and 40s is so important.

CH: Any last words of advice?

Z: Prevention is the best protection. A healthier lifestyle - good nutrition, stress management, quality sleep and movement - is health assurance you can afford.

Find out more about Dr. Zola at drmichaelzolaonline.com