

Understanding Pain After an Injury

ACUTE PAIN

1. Acute pain is caused by an injury or a disease process. For instance, injury-related acute pain can result from cuts, bruises, burns, pulled muscles, or broken bones, etc.
2. Acute pain is temporary. Most injuries heal in less than 3 months. More severe injuries can take a little longer to heal. As injuries heal, you expect the pain to eventually go away.
3. There is usually a simple reason why you have acute pain. The cause of acute pain is probably very obvious. It is usually easy to identify the damage in your body that is resulting in pain.
4. There is usually a simple solution for treating acute pain after an injury. Many times, the best treatment is just to give the injury time to heal. Medications, physical therapy, and other medical treatments can be effective in managing the pain while the injury heals.
5. The medical goal for acute pain is to identify the problem and provide treatments to manage the pain and help the damage heal.

CHRONIC PAIN

1. Injury-related chronic pain begins as acute pain. Pain becomes chronic when the damage in your body heals, but the pain doesn't go away.
2. Chronic pain is long-lasting. Pain continues after the expected period of healing (usually 3 months) following your injury. You may continue to experience pain for years or for the rest of your life. Over time, chronic pain becomes the primary problem, not physical injury.
3. There are usually many complicated reasons why you have chronic pain. A physical cause for chronic pain is often not obvious at all; it can be a mystery. Factors including physical de-conditioning, depression, stress, sleep problems, muscle tension, and fear of pain and re-injury can contribute to chronic pain.
4. There is no simple solution for treating chronic pain. Multiple solutions are usually required. That is why you do so many different types of therapies in a functional restoration program, including stretching/exercising, counseling, biofeedback/relaxation training, case management, educational classes, and medication management. Standard medical treatments that can help with acute pain are generally not very effective for chronic pain.
5. When you have chronic pain, the goal of treatment is to increase your ability to function, despite pain. This includes your ability to perform daily activities, your ability to work, and your ability to manage your symptoms. Function can be improved with increased strength and flexibility, education about your pain and injury, decreased anxiety/depression/fear, increased confidence and positive thinking, and development of skills for managing stress and pain.

CHRONIC PAIN

6. Your emotional status is considered a very important component in treatment of chronic pain.

7. Chronic pain cannot be “fixed,” but you can learn ways of managing your symptoms so they don't interfere too much with normal daily activities, including work.

8. Studies suggest that about 10% of people with work-related injuries develop chronic pain and disability.

9. During treatment for chronic pain, you are usually expected to increase your level of daily activity so that you can maintain a normal lifestyle. You may be expected to start doing normal chores around the house and eventually return to work, even though you continue to have some pain and physical limitations.

10. You are primarily responsible for getting yourself better with exercise, increased activity and productivity, learning ways of keeping the pain under control, learning ways of managing your pain when it flares up, and finding the courage to go on with your life. Your role in treatment is more active. Doctors and therapists are more like advisors, teachers, and coaches.

ACUTE PAIN

6. Your emotional status is not usually a primary focus when treating acute pain.

7. Many injuries that are causing acute pain can be “fixed” with proper medical treatment and time to heal.

8. Some studies suggest that about 90% of work-related injuries heal with time and simple medical treatments, pain eventually goes away, and people are able to resume their normal lifestyle.

9. During treatment for injury-related acute pain, you are usually expected to decrease your activities and to get lots of rest to help your injury heal. You may be expected to decrease your chores around the house or to stay home from work until you feel better.

10. Your doctor is primarily responsible for treating your injury. Your role in treatment is relatively passive (you are mainly expected to follow the doctor's orders).