**Exercising injured**

It’s so easy to use an injury or medical set-back as a reason to stop exercising. I’m often asked if it’s O.K. to come to the gym when one of their shoulders is in a sling after a surgery. The answer is, yes! Only after you’ve been cleared to do so. Think about what physical therapy is, after all. Movement, strengthening, flexibility, circulation and healing of that broken part. So why would it be any different for the rest of your body to also reap those benefits while you are in recovery? Exercise is physical therapy for the body and physical therapy is supervised exercise for the temporarily broken part.

You might have one broken part, but there are a whole lot of other parts to your body that aren’t broke and getting to the gym, no matter how limited your workout will be, would benefit all of you. Not to mention how a little movement and exercise will help your state of mind during your recovery.

First and most importantly, if you suffer any kind of injury or pain in your body, whether its general aches and pains or if they are legitimate medical concerns (bursitis, arthritis, back pain) make sure you’ve consulted your physician and between the two of you you’ve figured out a game plan. An acute injury might initially need rest, inflammation and pain management prior to starting an active recovery program.

My rule of thumb. Know the difference between pain and discomfort. I use this statement all the time when I’m teaching classes. If a movement or exercise stimulates a painful response (sharp, stabbing, immediate), then you need to stop doing that movement. If the movement or exercise simply makes you uncomfortable for the moment without any pain, then you can continue to challenge yourself. Discomfort is a good thing to feel when you are trying to get improvements. I’m talking about discomforts like burning of the muscles or tightness during stretching. These kinds of discomforts initiate strength gains and flexibility improvements as the muscles and joints recover after being challenged a bit.

It’s important to remember that when a part is broken or recovering it takes the rest of your body “as a whole” to help protect the injured/recovering part. For example, you might be prone to back issues for one reason or another and often find yourself down-and-out or constantly protecting your back in everything you do. Regular trips to the gym would be a good answer. Exercise would provide circulation in your frustrating back, it would strengthen your legs (so you can control your body while you stand, sit and walk) and for your upper body (so you can carry things better/easier with less strain on your back) and even help with your flexibility. Exercising with/for a bad back will provide added protection for your back.

What happens when you break an arm? You are forced to use the other arm extra while the injured arm heals. So, whether by force or by circumstance, the uninjured arm is forced to do more and get stronger. Just because you are unable to use one limb, can I remind you that you have three other limbs, an entire torso and some brain cells that would benefit from an exercise session at that moment.

Giving your injured joint or body part an honest and healthy opportunity to heal through improved circulation into that joint and improved function through gentle movement is why you’d workout with an injury. You might think why? I’m not doing very much. Yes, it will be enough for the improvements you need to heal. Subtly and gently the healing process gains ground and before you know it, the injured joint/area is stronger than it was prior.

So, to exercise properly while injured remember these things; exercise gently and slowly, let pain be your limiting factor (no pain), instead of worrying about repetitions exercise to a perceived exertion level (1 – 10, easy to extremely hard). Think of your exercise for your entire body, not just your injury and work out for you. Use an exercise professional who understands the body, can help you, guide you and make sure you are getting the benefits you want and need as you recover.