

Don't Let an Injury Take You Down

Getting hurt sucks, but you don't have to just sit on the sidelines. Use work-arounds to stay in shape and speed up your recovery.

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No matter how careful or conscientious you are, if fitness is a part of your life, sooner or later you're likely to suffer an injury.

What you do next is critical. There's a fine line between pushing through pain and giving your body too much of a break—and, it turns out, it's not always that easy to decide between the two.

It used to be pretty black and white, with experts advising to walk it off or sit it out. But there's often an overlooked third option: In the aftermath of many injuries, your smartest strategy is to work around it. "Your body is constantly speaking to you, but it usually starts with only a

Don't stretch your body past its limits.



DO THIS, NOT THAT!

Simple swaps to score similar results while detouring around an injured...

KNEE

Instead of: *Lunges*

Do: *Split squats*

Lessen stress and pressure on the knee joint by keeping it stationary. Placing your knee behind, not above, your toes reduces it further.

> Step one foot three to four feet in front of the other; bend both knees to 90 degrees, keeping chest up. Press through heels to return to standing.

BACK

Instead of:

Back extensions

Do: *Planks*

Minimise flexion and extension of the spine with a stability-based movement.

> Put your forearms on the floor shoulder-width apart, elbows directly under shoulders; extend legs so your body forms a straight line from head to heels. Brace your core and hold.

SHOULDER

Instead of:

Triceps dips

Do: *Triceps pushdowns*

Extreme angles can aggravate the shoulder; this removes that joint from the equation.

> Grab the high bar of a cable machine, hands shoulder-width apart; tuck your elbows at your sides and bring forearms parallel to the floor. Push the bar down until arms are almost straight.

ELBOW

Instead of:

Bench presses

Do: *Dumbbell flies*

Works the chest while keeping your elbows stationary to reduce stress.

> Lie faceup and hold a pair of dumbbells over your chest, arms straight and palms facing each other. Lower the weights out to the sides, your elbows slightly bent. Return to start.

whisper. It begins by telling you about stiffness in the body, muscles which are fatiguing, or joints that are taking more strain than usual. When we do not hear or listen to these whispers, the body needs to shout and produces pain to get your attention. Understanding these messages and what they mean is the key to remaining injury-free," says Robyn Stanford, a Physiotherapist at optimalTHERAPY. In short, if an exercise hurts, that's your body's way of telling you to exercise in a different way. Think of it like a detour: While it may take you slightly longer to reach your goals, it keeps you moving in the right direction, safely.

So the next time you're hit with runner's knee, a bruised elbow, or a pulled hammy, try using injury work-arounds to save your body—and your sanity.

Stay Fit Without Doing More Harm

We often assume activity and injury is an all-or-nothing thing—but when you're dealing with a moderate injury such as a tweaked ankle or pinched shoulder, taking a go-hard-or-go-home approach does your body zero favours and can result in a much more serious outcome. "It's very important to differentiate between pain that is doing you good, and pain that is doing you harm," says Donna Masing, a Sports Massage Therapist and Soft Tissue Specialist. "If while exercising you start feeling 'the burn'—the sensation that tells you your muscles are working hard—this is a good thing! However, pain that's doing you damage feels very different—it's sharper and more acute," she adds, explaining that this is your body's way of telling you that it doesn't like what you're doing and is a sign to stop or that injury may be imminent. "Let pain be your guide—if it's reaching a five out of 10 or higher on the pain scale,

contact your local sports therapist,” Donna adds.

But don't get too cosy on the couch: Any time you spend on the sidelines causes detraining, or a regression of your current fitness level. In fact, decreasing workouts for just two weeks can significantly reduce your cardiovascular fitness, lean muscle mass, and insulin sensitivity, according to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Physiology*.

When you exercise around your injury instead, it doesn't just keep you on track with your goals—it can actually help speed up your recovery time by reducing all-around deconditioning. “You need only be resting the injured or strained areas and those that would affect recovery,” Robyn says, continuing: “After only one week of immobility your muscles start to atrophy (i.e. shrink). The best thing you can do for an injury is diagnose it early. Once you understand what is wrong, you can respect the pain and move forward as your body allows. Training doesn't need to stop simply because you are injured—focusing on other areas of weakness to improve core strength and stability would prevent re-injury in the future, and maintaining the muscle strength in the rest of the body is important to stay on track with your goals.”

To make sure you don't push too hard, try this 1-to-10 scale from Brett Hoebel, trainer and creator of the *20 Minute Body* DVDs: If any exercise increases your pain level by more than two points, you need to try another move. And after each workout, give yourself two or three days to gauge how your body responds to the stress before pushing things further. If your pain lasts for more than 72 hours, you feel sluggish or depressed or are having trouble sleeping, it could be a sign of injury or possibly overtraining, and you should get checked out by a

soft tissue specialist, says Donna—though this can also depend on what other activities you have done during those three days to further stress the body and muscles, Robyn notes.

The Emotional Toll of Getting Hurt

Injuries don't just harm you physically. Your brain's response to regular activity (and lack of it) can have a significant effect on your mood, mentality, and recovery time. Taking a workout break can deprive your brain of the surge of endorphins that exercise produces, and if being active is part of your core identity or something that makes you happy, an injury can be a big blow to your self-esteem and mood. “An injury to any athlete can feel like a death sentence. It can mean time off training, away from your passion and even feelings of guilt for letting down coaches, teammates, and so on. It takes a lot of mental

strength to stay focused during recovery—but it is possible!” Donna says.

Aside from making you less fun to be around, these blues can actually have an impact on the healing process, especially if they leave you feeling weak and feeble. “While exercise is good for the immune system, you can reach a point where it starts going backwards and your immune system is suppressed from continuously being in a catabolic state—the body's function of breaking down food into nutrients for muscle repair and tissue growth,” Donna says. So if your immune system is compromised, it can slow your recovery time.

If there's a silver lining to an injury, it's the comeback potential. University of Buffalo researchers found that people who have gone through some adversity are mentally tougher than those who haven't; they're also better at handling mental and physical stress (like that marathon on your

bucket list), as well as maintaining a brighter outlook on life. “[Coming through an injury] allows us time to reflect and to focus on other areas which we have potentially overlooked in the past. It also gives us a better understanding of the body and its boundaries,” Robyn says. One way to stay positive: Measure your progress from the time of your injury, rather than where you were before. (So instead of thinking, *I used to be able to run five miles, no sweat!* tell yourself, *Last week, I could barely do one squat without pain, and now I can do 10!*)

If you're starting to feel discouraged, focus on using the work-around time to improve in other areas. Instead of thinking about what you can't do, use that time to take a weakness in another area—and turn it into a strength. The right attitude and training plan can not only get you back to your old self after an injury but also help you come back even stronger. ■

OUCH ALERT

Is that a normal ache, or more? With an injury...

It's Sharp

Think of pain as your body's alert system: If the messages are sharp and shooting, it's more urgent, says Donna.

It's Near a Joint

Most exercise injuries stem from overuse and centre on bones and tendons, experts say. That makes any pain in or around a joint a cause for concern.

It Hurts When You Aren't Moving

An achy knee during the first few minutes of a jog could be a warning sign. But it's a serious red flag if you feel joint



or bone pain when you're just lying in bed.

It's Been Three Days

Delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS), caused by microscopic tears in your muscles, is

necessary for muscle growth and lasts anywhere from 24 to 72 hours, says Robyn. If the pain persists beyond three days, it could be an injury.