

Playing with pain hurts in long run

If you're a pro athlete and getting paid millions of dollars, you're expected to learn to play with pain. I don't know when that started, but it's still not smart.

Minor injuries can become worse or recur because athletes don't back off when they're hurt. I like to call the opposite approach "intelligent rest"; it's not an exact science, and evaluating the injury and setting expectations and time frames requires some thinking. And it can be tough to do because the pressure is always on - from coaches, parents, teams and the athletes themselves.

It's one of the greatest challenges of sports medicine - how to get the athlete back into action with not enough time to heal.

What's alarming is how often this same "no time off" philosophy is applied to youth sports. The more serious the sport and activity, the more difficult it is to get adequate rest and recovery. Today, many sports are year-round, factoring in club and school seasons. And if it is the offseason, there are always

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sports-related conditioning and weight training activities.

Specialization at younger and younger ages is almost the norm now. And not surprisingly, some over-use problems or injuries are the result of too much repetitive motion.

One of the great ironies in pro, college and top-level amateur sports is while athletes often get the best care, they almost never get enough healing and recovery time.

Of course, very few of us are professional or even high-level amateur athletes. But the need for proper rest and recovery time is still very important. Recreational athletes who do aerobic, resistance and strength exercises often fall into the same mistake patterns - engaging in more activity more often and doing so with greater intensity than they should.

The key is to listen to your body. If you're consistently tired or dealing with persistent soreness and pain, you need to back off. Reduce the amount and intensity of the workout and allow things to calm down.

For example, if you're a jogger who experiences pain, become a walker for a few days. If the discomfort persists, see somebody who can evaluate your problem and recommend a solution.

If a young athlete complains of or displays persistent pain or discomfort, the parent needs to step in and prescribe some "intelligent rest."

Seek out a diagnosis, treatment and sensible guidelines for a return to action from a sports doctor or therapist. Proper amounts of rest and recovery are some essential keys to injury prevention and enhanced performance.

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