

# How to Cope with Injury

**N**o one wants to endure an injury, whether it is sports-related or not. There are a few important steps you can take to minimize the impact of injury to your training schedule. In December of 2008, I had surgery on my right hip for an injury that took me off the range for seven months. I'm sharing my experience because I want to help educate other shooters on the importance of a slow recovery, positive attitude, and mental training when injured.

First, you must accept what has happened. It doesn't matter how the injury took place; the important thing is to seek diagnosis and treatment as soon as possible. Remember that self-pity will not speed up the recovery process and may make the injury overwhelming. Recognize your limits and don't push them because



motivation, not make you feel like you are falling behind. Be dynamic in your thinking so that you can move through this situation as smoothly as possible.

Next, you must learn to draw from your experiences with

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it could slow the healing process. Start focusing on what you can do rather than what you cannot. For example, you can work hard to complete physical therapy to the best of your ability each day. Your injury will not magically disappear – the recovery process is slow and tedious, but treated with care and patience, you will return a strong shooter.

I became anxious that other shooters were surpassing me because they were able to continue training. The longer my recovery took, the more worried I became about my skills and the opportunities that I may have missed. This is not true. People are not gaining and advancing as much as you think. The skills you have honed will be there when you return and opportunities will continue to come each week, month, and year.

Next, try to focus on the positive and approach recovery with an optimistic attitude. You now have an opportunity to specialize in skills that may have otherwise been ignored. Such skills include meditation and visualization. This is the time to strengthen your mental training. When I returned from my injury, I was confident I still had the ability to shoot tens because I continued to shoot in my head during recovery. Visualizing your shot process will keep you in the game. Moreover, the therapy that you complete will improve your overall fitness. You will be fresh instead of burnt out when you return, and you can always continue to talk with or coach other athletes for skill reinforcement.

Physical therapy and treatment can be agonizing, boring,

and frustrating. Setting goals is the third step because it will help minimize these factors by giving you small hurdles to overcome. After my surgery, I set goals to build endurance and strength. Doing so helped establish a sense of accomplishment as I progressed closer to my goals.

Like all goal setting, working through injuries will bring setbacks and unexpected turns. You may find yourself getting better faster than you planned, or you may find that additional treatment is necessary. Stay positive. This plan is not written in stone. It is there to give you a sense of direction, an endpoint, and

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physical therapy, surgery, and treatment. You have been afforded an opportunity to test your skills in different settings. For example, before my surgery I had an MRI. First they injected ink in my hip and then I spent 40 minutes in a tiny tube. It was loud, small, uncomfortable, and creepy. They even gave me a panic button in case I needed to get out fast. I survived by planning for it and using the same relaxation techniques I use for shooting. I calmed myself down with meditative breathing and focused my mind on other things using cue words and visualization. When I was done, I knew I had a great practice in a stressful environment other than the range.

Talking with other athletes who have been injured will give you a better idea of what to expect. Discuss your plan with your coach because he/she may be able to direct you to someone who overcame an injury similar to yours. Use your resources to guide you, especially family, friends, coaches, and mentors. I spoke with several people on a regular basis to stay motivated, realistic, and productive.

Finally, when you come back to your sport, remember that it will take some time to dust the cobwebs off. Ease back into your training and reevaluate your goals. Shooting twenty shots may be a great accomplishment for one day. Recognize those little accomplishments and celebrate them. If you expect yourself to do too much too fast you may re-injure yourself or over-train. This is a growth process that will make you a better shooter. Stay positive and keep working hard! ■ Amy Sowash