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Injuries/Illness and Fitness

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At some point, almost everyone will be faced with an injury or illness that interferes with their fitness routines. These can range from minor inconveniences to life-changing events. Regardless of the seriousness of the injury or disease, finding a way to maintain fitness can be a challenge.

✕ Understand Your Injury/Illness

The first step in making good decisions about maintaining fitness is to have a clear understanding of your injury or illness. This requires good communication with health-care providers. Explain to your health-care team that staying healthy and fit is a priority for you and that you want to remain as active as possible while recovering. It is important to understand your limitations so that conditions are not worsened. Specifically, ask about the types of exercise for which you are cleared. Gain an understanding of how your condition typically progresses and ask your health-care providers for exercises that you can do safely.

✕ Modify Your Calorie Intake

It is not uncommon for people to gain weight during periods of forced inactivity. This means that not only will they have to battle back from injury/illness, but they also are going to be faced with losing the extra weight they have gained. Rather than face this double whammy, modify eating patterns to match the change in your activity.

The most sensible way to do this is through portion control. You can still eat the same number of meals and snacks, but limit the calories through eating smaller portions. This approach will allow you to maintain your eating routine and avoid feeling deprived of food.

✕ Look for Opportunities

Although they may not be apparent initially, with injury or illness, there are opportunities to work on some aspect of fitness. Rather than focus on limitations, look for opportunities. For example, a broken ankle limits ambulation, but still allows one to work on upper body fitness and core strength. Although aerobic conditioning receives the most attention with fitness programs, flexibility, muscular strength, and muscular endurance are key aspects of overall physical fitness. Injuries or illness might also provide an opportunity to try entirely different types of fitness routines. For example, a runner with a stress fracture might substitute swimming or yoga while allowing time for the bone to heal. Adopting a routine that includes mind/body exercise such as Tai Chi may prove beneficial while dealing with the stress that often accompanies illness or injury.

✕ Reestablish a Routine

When an injury or illness occurs, it is important to reestablish a fitness routine. Each day, find some way, no matter how small it seems, to work on fitness. With serious injuries, this may initially mean your daily physical therapy exercises. In less serious situations, this will mean a routine with modifications, but that is still focused on fitness goals. Examine your fitness goals and determine what is reasonable in both the short-term and long-term. Develop a plan that will allow you to regain as much function and fitness as possible. Fitness professionals and health-care providers such as physical therapists can assist with this process.

Regular exercise provides many physical and psychological benefits. Finding an exercise routine that fits your needs and abilities can help you deal with your illness or injury.

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