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**T**here are nearly 80 million baby boomers in the United States alone, and according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, sports-related injuries among boomers increased by one-third in the 1990s. An estimated 1 million adults ages 35 to 54 sustained athletic injuries requiring medical attention in 1998.

When you're on the injured list, effective postrehabilitation exercise is critical to your recovery. Even if you've never been injured, chances are that some day you may need postrehab exercise for an injury or other medical condition. For example, studies show that 80 percent of all North Americans will experience some form of lower-back pain during their lives.

The good news is that today, fitness professionals are available to help you make the transition back to health. To make sure you receive safe and effective postrehab training that will aid and speed your return to normal functioning, follow these general guidelines:

**1 Find a Qualified Professional.** Your postrehab trainer needs to be knowledgeable and experienced in providing postrehab exercise guidance for your specific injury or condition. You can obtain referrals from your doctor, a physical therapist or another health professional. Personal trainers can also be located on the IDEAfit.com Web site. Ask prospective trainers to describe their certifications, experience and training approach and explain how they will work in tandem with your other health care providers.

**2 Look for a Team Approach.** Your trainer's job is to assist your recovery by providing an exercise program that honors the guidelines set down by your physician, physical therapist or other medical professional. Your postrehab trainer should work closely with your medical team, obtaining approval to proceed with the program and taking into consideration any medications, chronic conditions or other factors that could affect the program design.

**3 Anticipate a Physical Assessment.** Before establishing your postrehab exercise program, your trainer should assess your fitness level and may evaluate your posture. A postural evaluation can help the trainer identify muscle substitution patterns that could jeopardize your recovery or promote further injury. Assessment information should be furnished to your medical provider.

## When You Need Postrehab Exercise

**4 Don't Procrastinate.** Therapeutic exercises have the best chance of helping you recover if they are done promptly and diligently. "You are working within a window of opportunity as tissue heals," says strength and conditioning specialist Anthony Carey, MA, of Function First Inc. in San Diego. "Scar tissue forms and compensatory neuromuscular programs become learned."

**5 Watch Your Technique.** Once your program is underway, impeccable execution of every exercise is critical to your postrehab recovery. "Without such diligence, your body will often take the path of least resistance to complete the exercise," says Carey. "This path could be part of a new neuromuscular program caused by compensation for the injury or part of the existing neuromuscular program that led to the injury. In either event, if a movement pattern is inappropriate, it needs to be corrected."

**6 Adhere to Your Program.** "If you're serious about your recovery, missed and infrequent appointments are not an option," warns Carey. You should maintain your home exercise program as recommended, also.

**7 Expect Documentation.** Your trainer should document your training and communicate your status regularly to your medical provider.

**8 Be Patient.** Recovering from an injury can be like learning to drive a car. When you first get behind the wheel, individual tasks—like applying the gas pedal, brakes, clutch, turn signals and so forth—must be learned separately before they can all be conducted together as one well-executed maneuver. Your recovery will also happen in stages as you strengthen and stabilize various muscles, developing the ability to perform increasingly complex movements.

**9 Ask Questions.** The better you understand the strategies and goals of your postrehab program, the more effectively you'll be able to participate in your recovery process.

**10 Prevent Further Injury.** Warming up before you exercise, avoiding overtraining and using appropriate conditioning and safety gear can help protect you against additional injuries as you age. Instead of falling back into old habits that may make you vulnerable to future problems, consult with your trainer and medical providers. They can suggest specific strategies to help you avoid trouble down the road.

