The Psychological Impact of Athletic Injury

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Introduction

Injuries can cause physical and psychological damage. Because mental health has a direct impact on physical healing, it is important for chiropractors to learn effective psychological coaching strategies when treating injured athletes. Doctors of chiropractic can assess the patient to determine which interventions are needed during the healing process, and when the athlete is emotionally ready to return to the field.

Psychological Response to Injury

Athletes can experience any of the following after onset of an injury:
- General Pain
- Stress/Anxiety
- Exercise Addiction
- Treatment Noncompliance
- Depression
- Fear

Pre-injury characteristics affecting injury response:
- Aggression
- Level of Self Esteem
- Self Efficacy
- Motivation
- Education/Knowledge
- Social Support

Situational factors involved in reaction to injury:
- Nature and extent of injury
- Type of sport
- Time of injury during the season
- Perception of cause of injury

Factors Related to the Psychological Impact of Injury

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Chiropractors should assess the physical and psychological progress of the patient.

In the initial consultation, chiropractors can:
- Build trust and rapport with the patient
- Understand the patient’s interpretation of how the injury occurred
- Encourage the patient to commit to their healing

The patient’s psychological needs can be determined with specific questions and careful evaluation of the patient’s responses:
- What was going on in your life prior to your injury?
- How did the injury occur?
- How important is sports involvement to you?
- What does this injury mean to you?
- How do you feel as a result of the injury?
- What are your insecurities and fears about the future?
- Who is affected by your injury?
- How would your life be different right now if you were not injured?

The following techniques can support the psychological needs of the patient during injury rehabilitation:
- Cognitive Restructuring
- Motivation
- Relaxation Techniques
- Panic Mitigation
- Imagery
- Rational Emotive Therapy
- Imagery

References: