PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF INJURY ON AN ATHLETE

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INTRODUCTION:
A psychological response is defined as the mental aspect of how an athlete copes and comes to terms with their injury and treatment. So basically it is what an athlete does mentally, to stay in the correct mind set of an athlete when injured. There are many psychological responses to injury, most of which help an athlete to cope and come to terms with their injury. When an athlete is injured, his psychological responses to most of the situations change.

Although research on the psychological impact of injury is in its infancy, this article reviews relevant literature focusing on post-injury emotional response, self-esteem, and the effect of mood disturbance on rehabilitation from sport injury. Injury is often accompanied by depression, tension, anger and low self-esteem, particularly in competitive, seriously injured athletes. Injuries, while hopefully infrequent, are often an unavoidable part of sport participation. While most injuries can be managed with little to no disruption in sport participation and other activities of daily living, some impose a substantial physical and mental burden. For some student-athletes, the psychological response to injury can trigger or unmask serious mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance use or abuse. When a student-athlete is injured, there is a normal emotional reaction that includes processing the medical information about the injury provided by the medical team, as well as coping emotionally with the injury.

Playing sports develops a person physically and mentally, whereas an injured athlete’s life comes to a sudden halt. The injury phase is that phase of an athlete’s life which he always tries to be cautious of, but even a slightest mistake makes the athlete more vulnerable. They are also likely to be angry at the repercussions of the injury, the injury, the injury and also other people if the injury is someone else’s fault. They also are likely to be angry at the repercussions of the injury, for example not being able to perform day to day task and not be able to participate in their sport. Some athletes, the psychological response to injury can trigger or unmask serious mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, and substance use or abuse.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF INJURY ON AN ATHLETE:
The athletic injury is a traumatic experience for them that could lead to a decrease in performance when they return from injury. When an athlete is injured they may feel a sense of fear during or when the rehabilitation process is almost over. This fear may be the result of the athlete thinking they may not return to full fitness or the same level of form that they once were at. They may not want to begin participating again because they feel they won’t perform as well as they usually would and people might start to think differently of them. This fear may also stem from them not wanting the injury to recur. This fear would then force the player or individual not to get involved as much or not put as much effort in because they don’t want to get injured.

Stress and Anxiety: This can often be felt by an athlete during competition. If the athlete then suffers an injury these feelings will be increased. As an injury progresses, concerns about the athlete’s short and long-term sporting prospects can become a psychological issue. If it’s a long-term injury they may feel they will miss out on a lot of opportunities in their sport and won’t achieve the full potential that they are able to. Common reactions from injured athletes include: panic or fear, sadness and demotivation. All of these may have an effect on the athlete’s performance when they return from injury.

Motivational Issues: Depending on the severity of the injury the athlete may have decrease motivation levels. Some injuries can take a long time to heal, as the duration of an injury increases, an athlete’s motivation towards their sport may decrease.

Decreased Confidence: This is very common for athletes who are returning to training and competition. An athlete could suffer from a lack of confidence in their own skill levels and decreased confidence in their fitness levels. If an athlete is returning from an injury they may also lack confidence in their abilities and the ability to push themselves physically. For example, if a marathon runner is returning from a hamstring injury, they may not push themselves as much as they usually would. This could be because they don't want the injury to recur or maybe because of lack of progress. Lack of progress may be due to the process taking longer than anticipated or simply from the athlete’s impatience and eagerness to get back into playing their sport again. Also, setting unrealistic targets for the athlete to meet is likely to frustrate them when they fail to meet the target.

• Depression: When injured, some athletes may show signs of depression, such as decreased energy levels, constant sadness and withdrawal from social contact. This may be because, if they were part of a team based sport such as football, rugby or basketball they know all training is done together as a team, forming bonds and it has a rewarding social aspect. If an athlete is injured, depending on the severity of the injury, they are often made to train separately, usually at different times to their teammates. This removes the social aspect from their sport. Athletes may feel they’re missing out on events that occur within training, such as any training developments.

• Fear: When an athlete is injured they may feel a sense of fear during or when the rehabilitation process is almost over. This fear may be the result of the athlete thinking they may not return to full fitness or the same level of form that they once were at. They may not want to begin participating again because they feel they won’t perform as well as they usually would and people might start to think differently of them. This fear may also stem from them not wanting the injury to recur. This fear would then force the player or individual not to get involved as much or not put as much effort in because they don’t want to get injured.

• Anger: The athlete is angry that it happened and angry at the circumstances in which the injury happened. This anger can be directed towards themselves as an individual for not doing everything they can to prevent the injury, the injury and also other people if the injury is someone else’s fault. They are also likely to be angry at the repercussions of the injury, for example not being able to perform day to day task and not be able to participate in their sport.

• Frustration: This frustration is most common in long term injuries and is likely to come as a result of the rehabilitation process that follows the injury. It could either be frustration at having to do it or frustration at the...
they believe they physically can't do it.

- **Isolation:** Many team sports players' frustration can be aggravated from the fact that they will not be involved in competition and training with their team members. The injured athlete may feel they are not contributing to the team and that they are missing out on team activities and cohesion. This can lead to players becoming mentally withdrawn from their team. If the player was to re-join the team after their injury they may feel like they're not welcome and won't feel comfortable in participating in team activities

**SEEKING TREATMENT:**

As first aid is very essential for an athlete after injury, likewise emotional support is also very important. Physical injury can be recovered through medicine but if an athlete does not recover emotionally, mentally and psychologically, it can prove to be fatal.

As an athletic trainer, team physician or other healthcare provider, it is important to recognize the common signs and symptoms for various mental health concerns and understand the resources available for treatment and management. It is a responsibility of the athletic trainer and team physician to do everything possible to 'demystify' mental health concerns and help athletes understand that mental health concerns are as important to recognize and treat as other medical and musculoskeletal issues. Underscoring the availability of athletic medicine staffs to provide early referral and management of mental health concerns is essential. Also essential is a basic understanding of what measures can make a difference in terms of treating mental health concerns as well as improving general wellness and performance.20 55–59 Treatment that can improve resilience and mental toughness can be expected to help mitigate stress and potentially minimize depressive symptoms.

It is important for coaches, athletic trainers and team physicians to provide support for injured athletes and keep athletes involved and part of the team. This might include keeping athletes engaged and encouraging athletes to seek help instead of ‘tough it out’. For coaches one of the most powerful actions is to ‘give the athlete permission’ and encourage them to seek care.

The following point can help an athlete recover from the psychological aspect of an injury:

- Education and awareness of mental health issues and/or services
- Accept Responsibility for Your Injury
- Maintain a Positive Attitude
- Self talk
- Use the Mind to Heal the Body
- Set Appropriate Goals
- Maintain Your Fitness While Injured
- Be patient
- Eat right
- Social support

**CONCLUSION:**

Injury is a stressor that has physical as well as psychological responses. The psychological response to injury is important. Although emotional responses to injury are common, problematic responses can be those that are persistent, worsen or appear excessive. At times, problematic responses can trigger serious mental health issues including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance use etc. There are obstacles to treatment of mental health concerns in athletes. Athletic trainers, team physicians and other healthcare providers play an essential role in recognizing and identifying athletes at risk for mental health concerns. Having a comprehensive plan in place to screen for, detect and manage student athletes with problematic response to injury is important. Several positive coping mechanisms and interventions can help to manage the student athlete with problematic responses. Understanding the mental health resources available, making timely referrals, and providing support for help-seeking behaviors are essential for the sports medicine team.

**REFERENCES:**