

The Other Side to Injuries

It's the words no athlete ever wants to hear, "You have an injury". It doesn't matter if it's a minor injury, such as an ankle sprain, or a more serious injury, such as an ACL tear. Once an athlete hears those words, emotions start to run high. For some, this emotional process will be very short, especially if it is a minor injury with little to no loss of playing time. For others, especially those with a long recovery, the emotional toll can almost be as difficult as the physical toll of the injury. It is important as friends and family to understand what the athlete is going through so we can help them cope with these feelings.

The first stage is **Denial**. We've all seen this stage firsthand after an injury. Many fans even go through this feeling. Even when something hurts, you don't want to acknowledge the pain. In your mind, if you don't acknowledge the pain or injury, it

doesn't exist. Once you accept that there is injury, it is common to be upset. **Anger** typically follows. The athlete will be very upset and often question why. It is only natural to be angry after getting hurt, but the longer they stay mad, the longer emotional healing will take. **Bargaining** will start once the anger subsides. If I do one more rehab set, can I resume competition? If I can do a specific exercise, can I play in part of the game? While this sounds like an athlete who is motivated to

return, it can actually set them back, especially mentally. It's only natural for an athlete to want to compete, but injuries have to heal prior to be able to return. Trying to negotiate your way back isn't what is best for your body. And once the bargaining doesn't work, oftentimes **Depression** sets in. This is a very emotional time, filled with a lot of sadness. There is a realization that this may take longer than expected, or you feel as if your identity isn't the same. This is a key time to find people and talk about how you're feeling. Talk to people you trust and people who have your best interests at



heart. Parents and friends who may have been injured before or even your athletic trainer or physical therapist are great resources. The final stage is **Acceptance**. Now you're ready for your comeback. The sooner you can reach full acceptance of what has happened and what you need to do to return, the quicker you will recover, at least mentally from the injury.

Some athletes will go through these stages very quickly while some won't. Every person is different. But by being supportive and understanding of someone going through this process can make all the difference. Injuries are traumatizing, physically and mentally, and the more information you know about both your injury and what you are about to face, the better equipped you are to handle it.

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