

# 5 Tips to prevent overuse injuries

## 1. Understanding load

When it comes to load and overuse injuries, an important thing to understand is what constitutes load. While people often think load refers exclusively to cardiovascular or strength training, the load actually encompasses everything from lifting a kettle to painting your house.

When people present to physiotherapy for gradual onset pain one of the first questions we often ask is “has anything changed in your usual routine?” The reason this is important is that this tells us whether there has been any unusual loading which may be contributing to the development of your pain.

## 2. Build exercise gradually to avoid overuse injuries

One of the most common presentations we see as physiotherapists are people who have recently changed their gym/exercise routine or those who are starting for the first time. Exercise is great for improving both physical and emotional health, however often we see people who have hit the gym or the pavement too much too soon, leading to overload and them breaking down.

Take this common presentation for example – *A 45-year-old male has recently started running 3 times per week. He usually runs 3-4km at a time, at a comfortable pace. One Saturday he goes for a run and is feeling good so he decides to go a bit further and runs 10km. He pulls up a bit sore in his achilles that night but puts it down to general soreness, only problem is now its the following Saturday and he hasn't run all week because of his Achilles pain.*

As a general rule, it is important when starting to progress the frequency, duration, or intensity of your exercise sessions, that you do so gradually to allow your body to adapt to the increased demands of the task.

### **3. Incorporate some variety into your training to avoid overuse injuries**

Whether you're training for a marathon or just trying to get fit for other health reasons, it's always important to ensure variety in the types of exercise and training that you do. Take running, for example, if you constantly hit the pavement every day, you're putting a lot of force and load through the bones and muscles of your legs. This increased stress can lead to bone and muscle stress, which can completely derail your training schedule. Including a mixture of different cardiovascular training methods (running, cycling, swimming, cross trainer) along with some strength training, is highly beneficial in reducing the accumulative loading applied to the bones and muscles.

### **4. Ensure adequate rest**

Following on from the above tips, it is important to ensure with any progression of exercise or increases in work or home jobs, that we add rest days/breaks to allow the body to recover and rejuvenate. As a general rule for the gym, incorporating 1-2 rest days per week, and not training the same body part on consecutive days is a good place to start.

### **5. Seek early intervention**

It is very common for people experiencing pain due to overuse injuries, to present to physiotherapy anywhere from 1 week to 12 months after the initial onset of pain. Not surprisingly, it is often those who present early that achieve faster improvements in their pain. In the presence of persistent pain, muscles, nerves and joints become more sensitive and less tolerant to load, making rehabilitation slower.

While the tips above are a good way to prevent overuse injuries, if you've already developed pain and you feel it may be due to loading, the most important thing to do is consult a physiotherapist for assessment and rehabilitation.

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