An injury that just doesn’t seem to go away...

Injuries. Nobody wants them but almost everybody gets one. At some point in our lives we will injure ourselves. No matter how small that injury may be it can affect our everyday lives and prevent us from being the active and busy people we are. Things we take for granted, like running for the bus or walking uphill, can suddenly prove impossible and our injury becomes annoyingly inconvenient. Put on top of that a love for the gym, sport, or any highly physical career and it can put a big part of our life on hold.

So what do we do about it? Well, I can certainly give you a personal account of what not to do! I have been suffering with high hamstring tendinopathy since November last year. This means that I have damaged the hamstring tendon that originates from the ischial tuberosity (the ‘sit bones’); basically it’s a pain in the butt. I was working as a dancer in rehearsals for a very demanding show and the pain came on gradually. At first I just thought that my hamstring was tight from previous days’ rehearsals, but it soon became clear that the pain was concentrated at the top of my hamstring at the attachment point. The pain became more concentrated and my range of movement started to decline. I knew something was up.

Off I went to the physio and he told me it was most likely hamstring tendinopathy. The best treatment? REST. The one thing I couldn’t do as we were about to open the show. From then on it would be performing every day, most of the time twice a day, meaning repetitive movements and the worst of all: high kicks. I wanted to keep performing, or to put it another way, I needed to keep my job! The physio gave me some shock wave therapy, taped me up and said to sit on an ice pack whenever I had a break in the dressing room. Does that sound like the way to a speedy recovery? I can tell you that it wasn’t. Here we are in July and although my range of motion is slowly creeping back (thanks to my wonderful Osteopath), I am still suffering with the injury and its associated pain. As I sit here now writing this I can already feel pain around my right sit bone.

I hope that most of you reading this don’t have a dance career or other elite sport that restricts you in your recovery from any injuries. If that is the case then you have no excuse but to REST any acute injuries. I truly believe that rest is the most important thing at the very start of recovery. Most likely the injured area will become inflamed and red and you must let your body do this. It is its way of protecting the area and ensuring that blood flow is maximal to kick start the healing process. Let it happen. Anti-inflammatory drugs will inhibit this and while on the outside it may look better, the pain lessens, and you are able to go on with your day, it is not actually helping the problem. After about 3 days of TOTAL REST you may venture outside of your hermit-like existence and seek professional advice from either a doctor, physiotherapist, osteopath or someone similar. I know I may seem like a bit of a hypocrite, but I am so aware of proper healing because of the fact that I am dealing with a chronic injury. All injuries are different and need different things, but the one thing they have in common is benefitting from rest. It certainly doesn’t do any harm.

Perhaps the most irritating thing when you are an active person with an injury is the feeling that all your hard fitness work is just going to reverse itself. It doesn’t have to. Depending on what the injury is you can still train other parts of your body in isolation or take up a less impactful method of exercise. My favourites when injured are swimming, Pilates and yoga. Swimming is so great for injuries involving the foot, ankle or lower leg because there is no weight bearing involved. Pilates is always good to incorporate in your training regime no matter what, because a deep core strength will support your body in everything you do and help with proper alignment. I would say that Pilates is actually great for injury prevention! The last one, yoga, I still couldn’t do for a while into my recovery. With tendon injuries it can be difficult because they shouldn’t be stretched or strained, and yoga is all about flexibility. However, for injuries in the belly of a muscle, most physiotherapists will advise a stretching programme and yoga will do wonders to complement this.

Ultimately it is about listening to your body. If something hurts, don’t do it! Some people talk about good pain and bad pain…for example if you are stretching a muscle it can be painful but not in a harmful way. Most people can recognise when the pain becomes too much or ‘bad’, indicating that they have gone too far. On the flip side of that, we often cannot stretch certain muscles enough by ourselves. I would suggest seeing a sports massage therapist (such as myself!) or a physio to help you out with passive stretching. Particularly post massage, when all of your muscles are warm and adaptable, an assisted passive stretch can hit the spot.

Take care out there and rest up! (Just think of it as an excuse to have a 3-day long Netflix marathon #injuredandwinning).