



# **3 Commonly Asked Questions About Staying Active After Being Wounded or Injured**

## **1. Why is staying active important?**

Experiencing a wound or injury can make physical activity, even daily tasks, challenging. Things that were easy before may now require a great deal of effort, or even cause pain, yet it may be more important than ever to stay active. Physical activity while recovering from an injury can decrease and even prevent many physical and psychological symptoms. For example, it can:

- Improve dizziness, reduce headaches, and improve attention control after a traumatic brain injury (TBI)<sup>1</sup>
- Decrease the odds of experiencing PTSD symptoms<sup>2</sup>
- Strengthen the core, which helps maintain balance and improve gait following lower extremity amputations<sup>3</sup>
- Improve walking distance, walking speed, muscle force, and recovery time in lower limb amputees<sup>4</sup>
- Prevent decreased muscle strength<sup>5</sup>
- Reduce the risk of depression<sup>6</sup>

## **2. Won't I re-injure myself, or make the pain worse?**

It is not uncommon for individuals who have experienced an injury to avoid physical activity because they are concerned they will re-injure themselves or make any pain they are experiencing worse.<sup>7</sup> Ironically, avoiding physical activity can actually increase the risk of re-injury and developing chronic pain. One reason is that avoiding activity leads to weak and imbalanced muscles and decreased physical function. The muscle imbalances increase the risk of injury, while muscle weakness and decreased function means completing day-to-day tasks, (even getting in and out of your vehicle) could become more difficult and uncomfortable. This can become a vicious cycle: pain and fear of re-injury can lead to avoidance of physical activity, while lack of physical activity inhibits rehabilitation efforts.<sup>5,6,8-10</sup>

## **3. How do I stay active and safe?**

The first step is to speak to your healthcare team and understand what activities you can do safely. It is also important to work with your team to understand what pain is expected and what pain is a



warning sign that it is time to slow down. Pain does not always mean injury, so having a discussion about what to expect is important. Once you have developed a plan, here are some general guidelines and suggestions:

- If assistive devices have been suggested, use them and use them properly. This includes everything from canes to crutches to prosthetic limbs.
- Select an activity you do, or would like to do, in your daily life, such as squatting to pick something up off of the ground. Begin slowly practicing this movement. Once you have conquered this, you can incorporate additional, more complex movements.<sup>6,11</sup>
- Try recreation therapy (RT), which has been shown to help combat fear of re-injury.<sup>12</sup> RT does not have to be exercise, and activities can be done alone or with others. Start with activities that focus on current capabilities, such as:
  - Music
  - Sports
  - Education
  - Arts and crafts
  - Reading
  - Helping others

For more information on RT, talk to your doctor, physical or occupational therapist, or visit the [National Resource Directory](#) for a list of resources in your area.



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