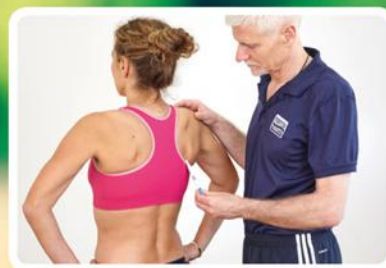
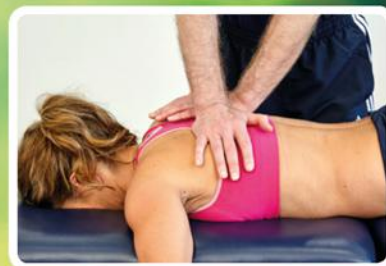


FIFTH EDITION

SPORTS AND SOFT TISSUE INJURIES

A GUIDE FOR STUDENTS AND THERAPISTS

Christopher M. Norris



Sports and Soft Tissue Injuries

The fifth edition of the retitled *Sports and Soft Tissue Injuries* sharpens its focus on the treatment of sports injuries, providing the most complete evidence-based guide for physiotherapists, sports therapists and medical practitioners working with athletes.

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Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	vi
<i>List of tables</i>	xvi
<i>List of treatment notes</i>	xix
1 Healing	1
2 Rehabilitation science	59
3 The hip joint	125
4 The knee	183
5 The shin	261
6 The ankle	293
7 The foot	319
8 The lumbar spine	361
9 The thorax and thoracic spine	423
10 The cervical spine	453
11 The face and head	479
12 The shoulder	497
13 The elbow	571
14 The wrist and hand	595
<i>Figure and table acknowledgements</i>	617
<i>Index</i>	629

List of figures

Figure 1.1 Timescale for healing.	2	Figure 1.20 Zones in articular cartilage.	38
Figure 1.2 Inflammatory elements.	3	Figure 1.21 Effects of joint compression on articular cartilage.	39
Figure 1.3 Vascular changes which occur in inflammation.	6	Figure 1.22 Sites of restricted movement in a nerve.	50
Figure 1.4 Formation and reabsorption of tissue fluid.	7	Figure 2.1 General Adaption Syndrome (GAS).	60
Figure 1.5 Visual analogue scales (VAS) used in pain description.	9	Figure 2.2 The fitness continuum.	66
Figure 1.6 Nociceptive pathways.	11	Figure 2.3 Effect of tissue temperature increase due to warm-up.	73
Figure 1.7 Pain neuromatrix.	14	Figure 2.4 The effect of warm-up on oxygen deficit.	73
Figure 1.8 Comparison between acupuncture and injection needles.	16	Figure 2.5 The effect of warm-up on tissue failure.	74
Figure 1.9 Needle insertion using plastic guide tube.	18	Figure 2.6 Relationship between arousal and performance.	75
Figure 1.10 Relationship between fibre orientation and stress–strain response.	22	Figure 2.7 Difference between active and passive ranges of motion.	82
Figure 1.11 Changing collagen fibre alignment during healing.	23	Figure 2.8 Hamstring stretch using straight-leg raise (SLR).	83
Figure 1.12 Strength of healing tissue following injury.	24	Figure 2.9 Emphasizing the upper portion of the hamstrings.	83
Figure 1.13 Specific soft tissue mobilization (SSTM) of the Achilles.	25	Figure 2.10 Rectus femoris stretch.	83
Figure 1.14 Epiphyseal injuries.	31	Figure 2.11 Upper trapezius stretch.	84
Figure 1.15 Stages of osteochondritis.	31	Figure 2.12 Neural adaptation to stretch training.	90
Figure 1.16 Stages of fracture healing.	32	Figure 2.13 The rating of perceived exertion (RPE) scale.	96
Figure 1.17 Changes in bone density with age.	34	Figure 2.14 Open- and closed-chain movements.	100
Figure 1.18 Incidence of common osteoporotic fractures.	34	Figure 2.15 Assessing muscle imbalance.	104
Figure 1.19 Exercise prescription for osteoporosis.	36	Figure 2.16 Relative stiffness.	105

Figure 2.17 Relative stiffness in the body.	105	Figure 3.23 Sliding exercises in (A) frontal plane and (B) sagittal plane.	152
Figure 2.18 Muscle types (extended classification).	106	Figure 3.24 Hip adductor strength, (A) using band and (B) gravity resisted.	153
Figure 2.19 Changes in muscle activity with increases in speed.	107	Figure 3.25 Avulsion injury around the hip.	154
Figure 2.20 Muscle length adaptation.	107	Figure 3.26 Common sites for avulsion injuries around the hip.	154
Figure 2.21 Effects of immobilizing a muscle in shortened and lengthened positions.	108	Figure 3.27 Position of the piriformis muscle.	155
Figure 2.22 Trigger points within hyperactive limb muscles.	112	Figure 3.28 Gluteal stretch.	155
Figure 2.23 Components of proprioception.	114	Figure 3.29 Mechanical differences between male and female pelvis.	156
Figure 3.1 Angulation of the femoral neck.	126	Figure 3.30 Trendelenburg test.	158
Figure 3.2 Craigs test.	126	Figure 3.31 Targeting the ITB.	160
Figure 3.3 Bony trabeculae of the upper femur.	127	Figure 3.32 Hip strengthening.	162
Figure 3.4 Capsular ligaments of the hip joint.	127	Figure 3.33 Surface marking of buttock structures.	164
Figure 3.5 X-ray showing myositis ossificans traumatica (MOT).	132	Figure 3.34 Trigger points of the buttock.	164
Figure 3.6 Rectus femoris strengthening and stretching.	132	Figure 3.35 Cam and pincer impingements.	165
Figure 3.7 Rectus femoris tear.	133	Figure 3.36 FADDIR and FABER tests.	167
Figure 3.8 Biarticular muscles of the leg.	135	Figure 3.37 Slipped upper femoral epiphysis.	172
Figure 3.9 The slump test.	139	Figure 3.38 Quadrant test using close grip and bodyweight.	173
Figure 3.10 The straight-leg slider.	139	Figure 3.39 Lateral gliding using quadrant grip.	173
Figure 3.11 The Nordic hamstring exercise (NHE).	141	Figure 3.40 Lateral gliding in crook lying using seatbelt.	174
Figure 3.12 Deadlift actions using barbell.	141	Figure 3.41 MWM for hip.	174
Figure 3.13 Single-leg actions.	142	Figure 3.42 (A) Longitudinal distraction in loose pack position using seatbelt. (B) Longitudinal hip distraction using three-point contact.	175
Figure 3.14 Bridging actions.	143	Figure 4.1 The Q angle.	183
Figure 3.15 Box drop.	144	Figure 4.2 Contact areas of the patella at different angles of flexion.	184
Figure 3.16. Modifying traditional hamstring stretches.	146	Figure 4.3 Patellar stress.	185
Figure 3.17 Hamstring exercises in closed kinetic chain.	147	Figure 4.4 Characteristic changes in isokinetic evaluation with anterior knee pain.	186
Figure 3.18 Hip adductor strengthening.	149	Figure 4.5 Closed-chain patellar stability re-education.	187
Figure 3.19 Supported side bridge using chair.	149		
Figure 3.20 Adductor stretching.	150		
Figure 3.21 Osteitis pubis.	151		
Figure 3.22 Palpation of the groin.	151		

List of figures

Figure 4.6 Malalignment factors in patellofemoral pain.	189	Figure 4.28 Articular surface pressure distribution with muscle co-activation.	219
Figure 4.7 Angle of pull of quadriceps onto patella.	189	Figure 4.29 Reflex hamstring contraction latency is the time interval between the initial tibial displacement and the first measurable reaction of the hamstrings.	219
Figure 4.8 Patellar position.	190	Figure 4.30 Rehabilitation of reflex hamstring contraction.	220
Figure 4.9 Assessing patellar glide using zinc oxide taping.	191	Figure 4.31 Anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) elongation relative to Lachman test (using an 80 lb pull).	221
Figure 4.10 The A angle.	191	Figure 4.32 Knee position: (A) knock-knee; (B) bow-legged.	224
Figure 4.11 Radiographic measurements of patellar position.	191	Figure 4.33 Hip hinge – angle trunk forwards excessively.	224
Figure 4.12 Correction of patellar position using tape.	193	Figure 4.34 Thoracic flexion.	224
Figure 4.13 Gluteal actions in PFPS rehabilitation.	195	Figure 4.35 (A) Flat lordosis; (B) XS lordosis.	225
Figure 4.14 Surgical procedures used in anterior knee pain treatment.	196	Figure 4.36 Posterior sag with posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) deficient knee.	226
Figure 4.15 Test for patellar glide.	197	Figure 4.37 Alteration in mechanical advantage of the knee following posterior cruciate ligament (PCL) rupture.	226
Figure 4.16 Iliotibial band friction syndrome.	199	Figure 4.38 Functional testing of the knee.	228
Figure 4.17 ITB stretch positions.	201	Figure 4.39 Attachments of the medial menisci.	229
Figure 4.18 Hip abductor strengthening in ITBS.	202	Figure 4.40 Posterior aspect of the left knee.	229
Figure 4.19 Palpation of medial knee structures.	205	Figure 4.41 Perimeniscal plexus.	230
Figure 4.20 Palpation of lateral knee structures.	205	Figure 4.42 Movement of the menisci with flexion and extension of the knee.	230
Figure 4.21 Collateral ligament tests: (A) valgus, (B) varus and (C) using practitioner support.	206	Figure 4.43 The effect of cartilage removal (meniscectomy) on the knee.	231
Figure 4.22 Anterior drawer test.	209	Figure 4.44 Common meniscal tears.	231
Figure 4.23 The Lachman test and modifications.	209	Figure 4.45 (A) McMurray's test. (B) Apley grinding test.	232
Figure 4.24 The pivot shift test.	210	Figure 4.46 Meniscal abnormalities.	235
Figure 4.25 (A) Structures contributing to combined instabilities of the knee (B) Movement directions.	212	Figure 4.47 Incidence of jumper's knee.	237
Figure 4.26 Staged anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) exercises.	216	Figure 4.48 Exercise therapy for knee extensor mechanism.	239
Figure 4.27 Closed kinetic chain action following anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) repair.	217	Figure 4.49 Abduction/adduction in extension.	245
		Figure 4.50 Abduction/adduction in flexion.	245

Figure 4.51 Anteroposterior (AP) glide using block.	245	Figure 5.14 X-ray of stress fracture.	272
Figure 4.52 Posteroanterior (PA) glide in crook lying.	246	Figure 5.15 Correct landing action from a jump.	274
Figure 4.53 Lateral glide using seatbelt.	246	Figure 5.16 Structural variation in popliteal artery entrapment.	275
Figure 4.54 Capsular stretch.	246	Figure 5.17 Calf taping.	276
Figure 4.55 Joint distraction gripping patient's tibia beneath arm.	247	Figure 5.18 Example massage techniques for the calf.	276
Figure 4.56 Joint distraction using couch headboard.	247	Figure 5.19 Achilles rehabilitation.	277
Figure 4.57 The mediopatellar plica.	249	Figure 5.20 Contact point of Achilles tendon moves downwards as plantarflexion increases.	279
Figure 4.58 Extensive insertion of semimembranosus.	250	Figure 5.21 Examination of the Achilles tendon palpation for thickening.	281
Figure 4.59 Baker's cyst.	252	Figure 5.22 Transverse frictional massage for the Achilles tendon.	282
Figure 4.60 Fat pad unloading using taping.	253	Figure 5.23 SSTM of the Achilles.	283
Figure 5.1 Compartments of the lower leg.	262	Figure 5.24 Calf squeeze (Thompson) test for Achilles tendon rupture.	286
Figure 5.2 (A) Anterior compartment syndrome. (B) Deep posterior compartment syndrome. (C) Superficial posterior compartment syndrome. (D) Lateral compartment syndrome.	263	Figure 5.25 Foot alignment by region.	288
Figure 5.3 Medial tibial stress syndrome.	265	Figure 5.26 Achilles bursae.	289
Figure 5.4 Deload taping for anterior shin pain: (A) spiral, (B) strip, (C) K tape.	266	Figure 6.1 Compression forces on the talus during running.	294
Figure 5.5 Muscle stripping technique for tibialis anterior trigger point.	268	Figure 6.2 The ankle ligaments.	295
Figure 5.6 Trigger points of the long toe extensors.	268	Figure 6.3 Assessing severity of ankle injury from swelling.	296
Figure 5.7 Trigger points of the lateral compartment muscles.	268	Figure 6.4 Anterior drawer test.	297
Figure 5.8 Trigger points of the posterior compartment.	269	Figure 6.5 Syndesmosis test.	297
Figure 5.9 Self-treatment of the tibialis anterior using the heel.	269	Figure 6.6 Ankle joint mobilizations.	300
Figure 5.10 Self-treatment of the peroneus longus using both hands.	269	Figure 6.7 Mobilization with movement (MWM) to ankle joint.	300
Figure 5.11 Creating more force by using the 'backnobber' apparatus.	270	Figure 6.8 Hopping patterns in ankle rehabilitation.	302
Figure 5.12 Traditional acupuncture points used in the treatment of shin pain.	270	Figure 6.9 Balance tests for ankle stability.	304
Figure 5.13 Distribution of stress fractures.	271	Figure 6.10 The Chronic Ankle Instability Scale.	306
		Figure 6.11 Lateral view of the ankle, showing the os trigonum and Stieda's process.	308
		Figure 6.12 Tendons near the malleoli.	308
		Figure 6.13 Heel raise action gripping block.	312

List of figures

Figure 6.14 Arch lift exercise, weightbearing.	312	Figure 7.22 Metatarsal padding and tape.	342
Figure 6.15 Step down maintaining arch height.	313	Figure 7.23 The lateral side of the foot is moved around the cuboid, the medial side around the navicular cuneiforms.	343
Figure 6.16 The tarsal tunnel.	313	Figure 7.24 Mobilizations of the cuboid bone.	343
Figure 6.17 The subtaloid and mid-tarsal joints.	314	Figure 7.25 Longitudinal mobilization of the first ray.	344
Figure 6.18 Manual therapy of the subtaloid joint.	315	Figure 7.26 Ischaemic pressure using a 'plunger' for the plantar fascia.	344
Figure 7.1 Weightbearing motion of the subtaloid joint.	320	Figure 7.27 Self-treatment in cross-leg sitting using thumbs.	344
Figure 7.2 (A) The walk cycle and (B) the run cycle.	322	Figure 7.28 Ground reaction forces in rearfoot and mid-foot runners.	348
Figure 7.3 Force acting through the foot during walking.	322	Figure 7.29 Force vector curves for rearfoot and mid-foot runners.	349
Figure 7.4 Phasic muscular activity during normal ambulation.	324	Figure 7.30 Parts of the sports shoe.	350
Figure 7.5 Wear pattern on sports shoes.	326	Figure 7.31 Lasts.	351
Figure 7.6 Femoral and tibial alignment.	327	Figure 7.32 Parts of the sports shoe.	351
Figure 7.7 Tibia vara measurement made from standing position.	327	Figure 7.33 Effect of leverage in running shoes.	353
Figure 7.8 Structure of the first metatarsophalangeal joint.	328	Figure 7.34 Stresses produced when the sole is flexed.	353
Figure 7.9 Forced hyperextension causes soft tissue damage and possible sesamoid disruption – 'turf toe'.	328	Figure 7.35 Function of intrinsic musculature in the (A) unshod and (B) shod foot.	355
Figure 7.10 Turf toe taping.	329	Figure 8.1 (A) Concentric band of annular fibres. (B) Horizontal section through a disc.	362
Figure 7.11 Pressure distribution in (A) non-Morton and (B) Morton feet.	330	Figure 8.2 Intra-articular structures of the lumbar zygapophyseal joints.	364
Figure 7.12 Hallux valgus.	330	Figure 8.3 Schmorl's node: herniation of nuclear material through the disc end plate.	366
Figure 7.13 Plantar fascia structure and action.	333	Figure 8.4 Discal degeneration.	367
Figure 7.14 Plantar fascia anatomical dissection.	333	Figure 8.5 Relative pressure changes in the third lumbar disc.	367
Figure 7.15 Classic low-dye taping.	336	Figure 8.6 Vertebral movement during flexion.	368
Figure 7.16 Plantar fascia specific taping.	336	Figure 8.7 Vertebral movement during rotation.	369
Figure 7.17 Plantar fascia stretch.	337	Figure 8.8 Directional patterns of end-range stress in the lumbar spine.	370
Figure 7.18 High-load training for PF.	338	Figure 8.9 Stages of disc herniation.	371
Figure 7.19 Taping for heel pad.	340	Figure 8.10 Ligaments of the spinal segment.	372
Figure 7.20 Padding for interdigital neuroma.	340		
Figure 7.21 Freiberg's disease of the metatarsal head.	341		

Figure 8.11	The spinal segment as a leverage system.	372	Figure 8.36	Lumbar stabilization exercises.	409
Figure 8.12	Effects of straight-leg raising.	377	Figure 8.37	Examples of resistance exercises.	410
Figure 8.13	The slump test.	378	Figure 8.38	Components of cognitive functional therapy programme.	411
Figure 8.14	Extension in lying (EIL) procedure.	380	Figure 9.1	Joints between the ribs and thoracic spine.	423
Figure 8.15	Flexion in lying (FIL) procedure.	380	Figure 9.2	Ribcage shape in scoliosis.	425
Figure 8.16	Flexion in step standing (FIS).	381	Figure 9.3	Visceral referral areas.	426
Figure 8.17	Side gliding in standing (SGIS).	382	Figure 9.4	The slump test (long sitting).	428
Figure 8.18	Lumbar mobilization.	383	Figure 9.5	Mobilization of an elevated first rib.	430
Figure 8.19	Phases of manipulation.	383	Figure 9.6	Mobilization of an elevated second rib.	431
Figure 8.20	'SNAGs' for the lumbar spine.	385	Figure 9.7	General rib mobilization for elevation.	431
Figure 8.21	The sacroiliac joint.	387	Figure 9.8	Treatment for a depressed first rib using anterior scalene stretch.	431
Figure 8.22	Sacroiliac joint stabilization – muscle/fascia coupling.	389	Figure 9.9	Treatment of a depressed second rib using thumb pressure.	431
Figure 8.23	Sacroiliac joint pain provocation tests.	392	Figure 9.10	Treatment for general rib depression using pisiform grip.	432
Figure 8.24	Leg-length assessment of sacroiliac joint.	392	Figure 9.11	Treatment of anterior rib displacement using side-bending.	432
Figure 8.25	Positional faults affecting the sacroiliac joint.	392	Figure 9.12	Treatment of posterior rib displacement using side flexion.	432
Figure 8.26	Muscle energy techniques (MET) for the sacroiliac joint.	393	Figure 9.13	Treatment of a posterior rib in prone lying.	433
Figure 8.27	Posterior pelvic pain provocation (P4) test.	394	Figure 9.14	Thoracic mobilization.	434
Figure 8.28	Mobilization of the sacroiliac joint (SIJ).	395	Figure 9.15	Ribcage movement during breathing.	437
Figure 8.29	(A) Good morning exercise, (B) Deadlift.	396	Figure 9.16	Formation of the inguinal canal.	439
Figure 8.30	Site of defect in spondylolysis.	396	Figure 9.17	Hernia repair incisions within the inguinal region.	440
Figure 8.31	An oblique X-ray of the lumbar spine, which has the appearance of a terrier dog.	397	Figure 9.18	Thoracic outlet syndrome.	444
Figure 8.32	Spondylolisthesis of L5 and S1.	398	Figure 9.19	Provocative tests for thoracic outlet syndrome.	445
Figure 8.33	Prone instability test.	400	Figure 9.20	Thoracic spine mobilization techniques.	447
Figure 8.34	The spinal stabilizing system consists of three interrelating subsystems.	400	Figure 9.21	Radiographic appearance of Scheuermann's disease.	449
Figure 8.35	The role of an integrated back stability program in patients with chronic lower back pain.	405			

List of figures

Figure 9.22 Exercise therapy for thoracic extension.	450	Figure 10.24 Soft tissue treatment of the suboccipital structure.	473
Figure 9.23 Thoracic mobility exercise.	450	Figure 10.25 Neck flexion test.	474
Figure 9.24 Resistance exercises for the thorax.	451	Figure 10.26 Use of pressure biofeedback unit (PBU) for deep neck flexor re-education.	474
Figure 10.1 Regions of the cervical spine.	453	Figure 10.27 Cervical extension in four-point kneeling.	475
Figure 10.2 Effect of head protraction and retraction on cervical spine alignment.	454	Figure 10.28 Occulomotor training in cervical rehabilitation.	476
Figure 10.3 Surface marking of the spine.	455	Figure 10.29 Examples of neck-strengthening exercises.	477
Figure 10.4 Structure of the vertebral artery.	456	Figure 11.1 Eye and lacrimal apparatus, indicating flow of tears.	480
Figure 10.5 Force line in relation to cervical injury during axial loading.	459	Figure 11.2 Functional muscle testing of the extraocular muscles.	480
Figure 10.6 Cervical examination tests.	461	Figure 11.3 Tooth fractures.	483
Figure 10.7 The upper limb tension test (ULTT).	462	Figure 11.4 The major bones of the face and head.	485
Figure 10.8 Craniovertebral ligament tests.	465	Figure 11.5 Assessing zygomatic fractures.	486
Figure 10.9 Diagrammatic representation of craniovertebral ligaments.	465	Figure 11.6 Mobilization techniques for the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).	488
Figure 10.10 Physiological joint mobilization.	466	Figure 11.7 Self-stretching procedure for the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).	488
Figure 10.11 Lateral flexion of the cervical spine.	466	Figure 11.8 Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) home exercise.	488
Figure 10.12 Accessory joint mobilization.	467	Figure 11.9 Trigger points in relation to the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).	489
Figure 10.13 Hand grip on side of head.	468	Figure 11.10 Traditional acupuncture points in relation to the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).	489
Figure 10.14 Hand grip using chin and occiput.	468	Figure 11.11 Intracranial haematoma.	493
Figure 10.15 Measuring the belt.	469	Figure 11.12 Trigemino-cervical nucleus.	494
Figure 10.16 Belt position.	469	Figure 11.13 Flexion-rotation test.	495
Figure 10.17 Anteroposterior (AP) glide using belt.	469	Figure 12.1 Major palpable structures of the shoulder.	498
Figure 10.18 Lateral glide using belt.	469	Figure 12.2 Rotator cuff muscle action.	499
Figure 10.19 Chin tuck exercise using overpressure.	470	Figure 12.3 Muscular restraints to anterior displacement of the humeral head in an overhead throwing action.	499
Figure 10.20 Enhancing sub-occipital flexion.	470	Figure 12.4 Muscle force couples which create scapular rotation.	502
Figure 10.21 NAGs in treatment of the cervical region.	471		
Figure 10.22 SNAGs in treatment of the cervical region.	472		
Figure 10.23 Muscles attaching to the base of the skull.	472		

Figure 12.5 Tests of scapular dyskinesis.	504	Figure 12.29 AP glide the shoulder joint using cupped-hand contact.	530
Figure 12.6 Stages of throwing.	505	Figure 12.30 Soft tissue work in side lying for GIRD.	531
Figure 12.7 Locking position and quadrant position.	507	Figure 12.31 MWM for glenohumeral abduction.	531
Figure 12.8 Sternoclavicular dislocation.	509	Figure 12.32 Palpation and treatment of rotator cuff tendon injury.	532
Figure 12.9 Tests for acromioclavicular (AC) joint dysfunction.	510	Figure 12.33 Vascularity of the critical zone.	533
Figure 12.10 Acromioclavicular joint taping.	513	Figure 12.34 Resisted rotation training for rotator cuff tendinopathy	534
Figure 12.11 Structures close to the clavicle.	515	Figure 12.35 Supraspinatus.	534
Figure 12.12 Enhancing scapulothoracic stability.	516	Figure 12.36 Infraspinatus.	535
Figure 12.13 Box taping to facilitate correct scapular alignment.	517	Figure 12.37 Subscapularis, anterior approach.	535
Figure 12.14 Faciliatory taping.	517	Figure 12.38 Acupuncture points and trigger points around the scapula.	536
Figure 12.15 Exercises to selectively strengthen the scapulothoracic muscles.	518	Figure 12.39 Biceps tendon subluxation.	537
Figure 12.16 Assessment of GH internal rotation in supine.	520	Figure 12.40 Ruptures to muscles in the shoulder region.	538
Figure 12.17 (A) Cross-body stretch with scapular counter pressure. (B) Sleeper stretches.	520	Figure 12.41 Stanmore triangle used for shoulder instability classification.	540
Figure 12.18 Sternal lift.	525	Figure 12.42 Anterior ligaments of the glenohumeral joint.	542
Figure 12.19 Overhead stretch on gym ball.	526	Figure 12.43 Active stabilizers of the glenohumeral joint.	542
Figure 12.20 Gym ball superman with star arms.	526	Figure 12.44 Anterior glenohumeral translation.	543
Figure 12.21 Pilates dumb waiter with band.	526	Figure 12.45 (A) Apprehension test – pain/ apprehension increases as an anteriorly directed force is applied. (B) Modified apprehension test – pain reduces with posterior pressure.	543
Figure 12.22 Abduction with lateral rotation using band.	527	Figure 12.46 Assessing muscle control of the glenohumeral joint.	544
Figure 12.23 Pilates cat paws.	527	Figure 12.47 Eccentric push-up as a global assessment of scapulothoracic stability.	545
Figure 12.24 Standing band pull.	528	Figure 12.48 Resisted isometric exercise for glenohumeral stability.	546
Figure 12.25 Single-arm row with single-leg stand.	528		
Figure 12.26 Cervical mobilization in sitting.	529		
Figure 12.27 PA glide to thoracic spine using pisiform contact point.	529		
Figure 12.28 Thoracic taping applied in supine lying.	530		

List of figures

Figure 12.49 Closed-chain exercise using partial and full bodyweight.	547	Figure 13.10 Radial nerve neurodynamic treatment.	582
Figure 12.50 Closed-chain shoulder rehabilitation.	549	Figure 13.11 Tennis elbow treatment.	583
Figure 12.51 Glenohumeral exercises.	550	Figure 13.12 Hand measurement to determine proper grip handle size.	584
Figure 12.52 Proprioceptive taping of the shoulder.	551	Figure 13.13 Forces on the elbow during throwing.	585
Figure 12.53 The glenoid labrum.	552	Figure 13.14 Palpation of the posterior elbow.	586
Figure 12.54 Mobilization techniques for frozen shoulder.	560	Figure 13.15 Triangular relation of epicondyles and olecranon with elbow flexion.	589
Figure 12.55 Exercise therapy for adhesive capsulitis.	561	Figure 13.16 Nerve compression in the elbow.	591
Figure 12.56 Combining shoulder lateral rotation and abduction with scapular stability.	562	Figure 14.1 The joints of the wrist.	595
Figure 12.57 Full-range stretching exercises for the shoulder.	562	Figure 14.2 The capsular and collateral palmer ligaments of the radiocarpal joint.	596
Figure 12.58 Weight-training actions for the shoulder.	563	Figure 14.3 Transverse arch of the wrist.	596
Figure 12.59 Entrapment neuropathy in the shoulder.	564	Figure 14.4 Grip force with changing wrist position.	597
Figure 13.1 Articulations forming the elbow joint.	571	Figure 14.5 The wrist showing the scaphoid bone.	599
Figure 13.2 (A) Carrying angle. (B) Lateral orientation. (C) Most common configuration of the trochlear groove. (D) Medial orientation.	572	Figure 14.6 Classification of scaphoid fracture.	600
Figure 13.3 Contact areas at different elbow positions.	573	Figure 14.7 Lunate dislocation injury occurs when the radius forces the lunate in a palmar direction, (B) resulting in dislocation.	601
Figure 13.4 Constraints to (A) flexion and (B) extension.	574	Figure 14.8 Examples of wrist mobilization.	604
Figure 13.5 (A) Abduction; (B) adduction; (C) flexion–abduction; (D) flexion–adduction; (E) pronation; (F) supination; (G) compression; (H) distraction.	575	Figure 14.9 Nerve compression in the wrist.	604
Figure 13.6 Palpation of tennis elbow.	576	Figure 14.10 Thumb tendinitis.	607
Figure 13.7 Deload taping.	578	Figure 14.11 Bennett’s fracture displaced proximally by the pull of the abductor pollicis longus.	609
Figure 13.8 Exercise therapy for tennis elbow.	579	Figure 14.12 Hyperextension injury of the finger.	609
Figure 13.9 Manual therapy for tennis elbow.	580	Figure 14.13 Dislocations of the proximal interphalangeal joint.	610
		Figure 14.14 Interphalangeal joint of the finger.	610
		Figure 14.15 Results of injury to the extensor tendon mechanism.	611

Figure 14.16 Finger pulleys.	612	Figure 14.19 Autotherapy wrist mobilizations.	614
Figure 14.17 Effect of crimp (cling) grip on finger tendons.	612	Figure 14.20 Wrist abduction/adduction using a modified dumb-bell.	614
Figure 14.18 Finger taping for the prevention of 'rock climber's finger'.	613		

List of tables

Table 1.1 Pain descriptions and related structures	8	Table 2.5 ACSM guidelines for maintaining fitness in apparently healthy individuals	66
Table 1.2 Red flags in sport examination indicating medical investigation	9	Table 2.6 Benefits of regular exercise	66
Table 1.3 Sensory nerve fibre types	11	Table 2.7 Fitness component checklist	67
Table 1.4 Typical signs of central sensitization (CS)	16	Table 2.8 Characteristics of exercise addiction	70
Table 1.5 Factors slowing healing rate	23	Table 2.9 Example activities for neuromuscular training (NMT) as a warm-up	70
Table 1.6 A systematic analysis of X-rays, using the ABCs mnemonic	29	Table 2.10 Warm-up mechanisms	72
Table 1.7 The osteochondroses	32	Table 2.11 Factors limiting range of motion at a joint	79
Table 1.8 Classification of osteoporosis	35	Table 2.12 Muscle reflexes and stretching	79
Table 1.9 Management of articular cartilage degeneration	40	Table 2.13 Summary of stretching techniques	81
Table 1.10 Tissue changes in knee arthritis	41	Table 2.14 Adaptations to resistance training	86
Table 1.11 The capsular patterns	42	Table 2.15 Needs analysis in strength and conditioning	92
Table 1.12 Ligament injuries	43	Table 2.16 Proposed neuromuscular adaptations to plyometric training	97
Table 1.13 Munich classification of muscle injuries in sport	44	Table 2.17 Plyometric exercises	97
Table 1.14 Common sites for avulsion injuries	45	Table 2.18 Methods of progressing overload	98
Table 1.15 Phases of tendinopathy	48	Table 2.19 Factors associated with delayed-onset muscle soreness (DOMS)	102
Table 1.16 Fascial pathways	51	Table 2.20 Muscle types (basic classification)	103
Table 1.17 Clinical examination	54	Table 2.21 Methods of treating trigger points	113
Table 1.18 End-feel	55	Table 2.22 Factors contributing to reduced proprioception following injury	113
Table 2.1 Training variables using the FITT mnemonic	61	Table 2.23 Proprioceptive training	115
Table 2.2 Common trigger of overtraining syndrome	63	Table 2.24 Learning motor skills	116
Table 2.3 Symptoms of overtraining syndrome	64	Table 3.1 Muscle imbalances around the hip	130
Table 2.4 Daily training log	64	Table 3.2 Multifactorial components of hamstring rehabilitation	138

Table 3.3 Percentage of strength relative to quadriceps at 100%	144	Table 4.14 Main pathological features of patellar tendinopathy	238
Table 3.4 Progressive walk/run programme for hamstring rehabilitation	145	Table 4.15 Criteria for autologous chondrocyte implantation (ACI)	242
Table 3.5 Hamstring lengthening exercise protocol (L-protocol)	146	Table 4.16 Bursae around the knee	251
Table 3.6 Grading of osteitis pubis	152	Table 5.1 Compartments of the lower leg	261
Table 3.7 Muscle layers of the lateral hip	156	Table 5.2 Structures affected in compartment syndrome	262
Table 3.8 Bursae around the greater trochanter (GT)	157	Table 5.3 Aspects of running re-education in CECS	267
Table 3.9 Optimization of the Trendelenburg test in the clinic	159	Table 5.4 Pain classification	272
Table 3.10 Personalized hip therapy exercise programme for FAI	168	Table 5.5 Structures to consider in differential diagnosis of Achilles tendon pain	278
Table 3.11 Example exercises used in the rehabilitation of FAI	168	Table 5.6 Phases of tendinopathy	280
Table 3.12 Key exercises used in the management of anterior hip impingement	168	Table 5.7 Example post-surgical rehabilitation protocol following Achilles tendon repair	287
Table 4.1 Source of pain in PFPS	186	Table 6.1 Role of the collateral ligaments in ankle stability	295
Table 4.2 Factors associated with patella femoral pain syndrome (PFPS)	186	Table 6.2 Guidelines for rehabilitation of ankle sprain	301
Table 4.3 Evaluation of muscle tightness	186	Table 6.3 Measurement of ankle stability	304
Table 4.4 Guidelines for medial collateral ligament rehabilitation	207	Table 6.4 Indications of chronic ankle instability (CAI)	305
Table 4.5 Manual laxity tests of the knee	211	Table 6.5 Posterior tibial tendon dysfunction (PTTD) categorization	310
Table 4.6 Example rehabilitation protocol following ACL reconstruction	215	Table 7.1 Biomechanical changes in the rearfoot and forefoot	325
Table 4.7 Stages of ACL rehabilitation	218	Table 7.2 Plantar fasciitis nomenclature and differential diagnosis	332
Table 4.8 Qualitative analysis of single-leg loading score (QASLS)	218	Table 7.3 Factors associated with the development of CPHP	334
Table 4.9 Proprioceptive training to prevent ACL injuries in soccer players	221	Table 7.4 Pathological changes seen in plantar fasciitis	335
Table 4.10 Neuromuscular training for knee injury prevention	222	Table 7.5 Plantar heel pain late-stage rehab	339
Table 4.11 Common errors when performing a squat	223	Table 8.1 Lower back pain: the scope of the problem	361
Table 4.12 Follow-up after complete meniscectomy	234	Table 8.2 Back pain in specific sports	362
Table 4.13 Example rehabilitation protocol following meniscus repair	235	Table 8.3 Effect of exercise on the spinal disc	365

List of tables

Table 8.4 Common myths in the management of back pain in sport	373	Table 10.4 Posterior muscle layers of the neck	473
Table 8.5 Diagnostic triage	375	Table 10.5 Correction of movement faults during craniocervical flexion	475
Table 8.6 Movement of the sacroiliac joint (SIJ)	386	Table 11.1 Indications for ophthalmic referral following eye injury	480
Table 8.7 Starting positions for abdominal hollowing	390	Table 11.2 Common eye symptoms encountered in sport	481
Table 8.8 Evaluating lumbar instability	399	Table 11.3 Common features of sports-related concussion (SRC)	491
Table 8.9 Key principles of sensorimotor control	403	Table 11.4 Factors to be aware of following a concussion incident	491
Table 8.10 The role of motor control training in the rehabilitation of the Lumbar spine	404	Table 11.5 The Glasgow coma scale	492
Table 8.11 Interacting factors in CLBP	411	Table 12.1 Movement of the arm into abduction	500
Table 8.12 Pain concepts	412	Table 12.2 Red flags in shoulder assessment	506
Table 8.13 Functional training exercise	415	Table 12.3 Classification of acromioclavicular injuries	512
Table 8.14 Neuroscience-based rehabilitation for chronic lower back pain	416	Table 12.4 Factors associated with subacromial compression	519
Table 8.15 Integrated back stability model	416	Table 12.5 Common clinical tests for SAIS	522
Table 9.1 Red flags in the examination of the thoracic spine	426	Table 12.6 SSMP components	523
Table 9.2 Palpation of the thoracic vertebrae	427	Table 12.7 Classification of shoulder instability	540
Table 9.3 Rib palpation	427	Table 12.8 Typical clinical finding of polar instability types	541
Table 9.4 Classification of dysfunctional breathing	437	Table 12.9 Stability of the glenohumeral joint	541
Table 9.5 Sportsman's hernia: tissue pathology and history	440	Table 12.10 Proprioceptive training of the shoulder	547
Table 9.6 Muscle balance exercises for sports hernia	442	Table 12.11 Use of surface EMG in rehabilitation of anterior instability of the shoulder	551
Table 9.7 Example rehabilitation programme of inguinal disruption (ID).	443	Table 12.12 SLAP lesion types	553
Table 9.8 Postural presentation in thoracic outlet syndrome	444	Table 12.13 Guidelines for rehabilitation following anterior glenohumeral dislocation	556
Table 10.1 Symptoms of vertebrobasilar insufficiency (VBI)	457	Table 12.14 Stages of frozen shoulder	557
Table 10.2 Differential diagnosis in cervical spine examination	458	Table 12.15 Pathological and histological changes in frozen shoulder	558
Table 10.3 Clinical test cluster for determination of cervical radiculopathy	463	Table 12.16 Movement therapy for adhesive capsulitis	560

Table 13.1 Percentage contribution of elbow structures to stability of the joint	574	Table 13.3 Throwing injuries to the elbow	585
Table 13.2 General causes of tennis elbow	576	Table 14.1 Assessing motion of individual carpal joints	598

List of treatment notes

1.1 Medication used in soft tissue injury	4	5.3 Early work on eccentric training	284
1.2 Pain description in examination	8	7.1 Manual therapy techniques for the foot	343
1.3 Dry needling	16	7.2 Fitting a running shoe	354
1.4 Management of acute soft tissue injury	19	8.1 Lumbar stabilization starting positions	390
1.5 Influencing the mechanical properties of healing tissue	24	8.2 Trunk muscle changes in lower back pain	401
1.6 Diagnostic imaging	28	8.3 Stability training emphasizing muscle isolation	407
1.7 Training the fascia	51	8.4 Neuroscience education in lower back rehabilitation	412
1.8 Principles of physical examination	53	8.5 Neuroscience approach to treating CLBP	415
2.1 Overtraining syndrome	63	9.1 Manual therapy techniques for rib displacement	430
2.2 Tissue homeostasis	68	9.2 Changes to breathing mechanics	436
2.3 Warm-up technique	76	10.1 Surface marking of the cervicothoracic region	454
2.4 Passive stretching	82	10.2 Seatbelt techniques for cervical traction	468
2.5 Periodization	94	11.1 Surface examination of the eye	480
2.6 Historical resistance training methods	99	11.2 Dry needling in the treatment of TMJ pain	489
2.7 How subjects learn skilled movements	116	12.1 Restoration of scapulothoracic stability	516
3.1 Muscle imbalance around the hip	128	12.2 Shoulder symptom modification procedure	523
3.2 Two joint muscles	135	12.3 Example rehabilitation exercises used when managing subacromial impingement syndrome (SAIS)	525
3.3 Targeting the ITB	160	12.4 Rotator cuff trigger points	534
3.4 Trigger point treatment of buttock structures	163	13.1 Trigger points and acupuncture points in the treatment of tennis elbow	583
3.5 Altered movement quality and hip impingement	169		
3.6 Manual therapy techniques to the hip	173		
4.1 The squat exercise in knee rehabilitation	222		
4.2 Manual therapy techniques for the knee	244		
5.1 Manual therapy for shin pain	268		
5.2 Treatment of gastrocnemius tear	275		

Healing

Following injury, tissue which has been damaged must be replaced by living material. Two processes are possible, regeneration and repair. With *regeneration*, tissue is replaced by the proliferation of surrounding undamaged tissue. Therapy to produce this effect is currently in its infancy with stem cell therapy. With repair, however, lost material is replaced by granulation tissue which matures into a scar (Watson 2016), a process which most commonly reflects healing seen within the field of sports and soft tissue injury.

Therapists need to have knowledge of the processes which occur at each successive stage of healing to be able to select the treatment technique which is most appropriate for the stage the subject is presenting. A technique aimed at reducing the formation of swelling, for example, would be inappropriate when swelling had stopped forming and adhesions were the problem. Similarly, a manual treatment designed to mobilize soft tissue may not be helpful when inflammation is still forming and the tissues are highly irritable.

The stages of healing are, to a large extent, purely a convenience of description, since each stage runs into another in a continuum, the previous stage acting to initiate the next. The term *phasing* rather than separate stages may be more suitable. Traditionally, the initial tissue response has been

described as *inflammation*, but some authors see inflammation as a response separate to the processes occurring at the time of injury. Both injury and inflammation may be viewed as a reactive phase of injury, with the classical inflammatory period preceded by a short (ten-minute) period before the inflammatory mechanism is activated. The reactive phase may also be viewed as a lag phase (Hunter 1998), before the strength of the healing tissues begins to change. In any traumatic injury the initial stage is *bleeding*, which is the precursor for the inflammatory cascade seen as both a vascular and cellular response.

The second stage of healing has been variously called repair, proliferation and regeneration. The tertiary stage is normally termed remodelling. The terms injury, inflammation, repair and remodelling will be used in this text

When describing the stages of healing, the terms acute, subacute and chronic are helpful. The acute stage (up to 48 hours following injury) is generally the stage of inflammation. The subacute stage, occurring between 14 and 21 days after injury, is the stage of repair. The chronic stage (after 21 days) may be viewed as the stage of remodelling. The term chronic is also sometimes used to describe self-perpetuating inflammation, where

1 Healing

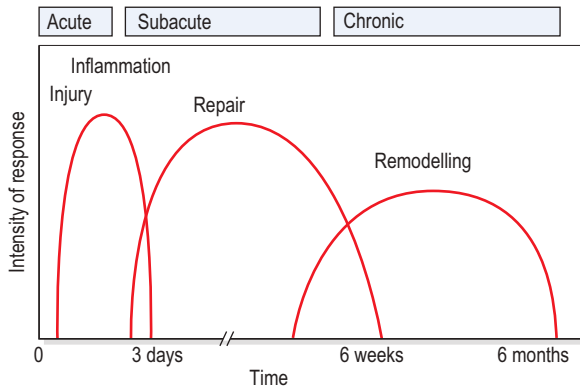


Figure 1.1 Timescale for healing. From Oakes, B.W. (1992) *The classification of injuries and mechanisms of injury, repair and healing*. In *Textbook of Science and Medicine in Sport* (eds J. Bloomfield, P.A. Fricker and K.D. Fitch). Blackwell Scientific Publications, Melbourne. With permission.

the inflammatory process has restarted due to disruption or persistent irritation of the healing tissues. The total healing process occurs over a continuum, shown in Fig. 1.1.

Keypoint

Treatment must be adapted to the stages of healing, which are injury, inflammation, repair and remodelling.

Injury

This stage represents the tissue effects at the time of injury, before the inflammatory process is activated. With tissue damage, chemical and mechanical changes are seen. Local blood vessels are disrupted causing a cessation in oxygen to the cells they perfused. These cells die and their lysosome membranes disintegrate, releasing the hydrolysing enzymes the lysosomes contained. The release of these enzymes has a twofold effect. First they begin to break down the dead cells themselves, and second, they release histamines and kinins which have an effect on

both the live cells nearby and the local blood capillary network.

The disruption of the blood vessels which caused cell death also causes local bleeding (extravasated blood). More vascular tissue such as muscle will bleed more than less vascular tissue such as ligament. On average, bleeding following soft tissue injury stops within four to six hours (Watson 2016). The red blood cells break down, leaving cellular debris and free haemoglobin. The blood platelets release the enzyme thrombin, which changes fibrinogen into fibrin. The fibrin in turn is deposited as a meshwork around the area (a process known as walling off). The dead cells intertwine in the meshwork, forming a blood clot. This network contains the damaged area.

The changes occurring at injury are affected by age. Intramuscular bleeding, and therefore haemorrhage formation, is more profuse in individuals over 30 years of age. The amount of bleeding which occurs will be partially dependent on the vascularity of the injured tissues. A fitter individual is likely to have muscle tissue which is more highly vascularized, and therefore greater bleeding will occur with muscle injury. In addition, exercise itself will affect gross tissue responses. Muscle blood flow is greatly increased through dilatation of the capillary bed, and again bleeding subsequent to injury will be greater.

Keypoint

The tissues of an active individual are more highly vascularized than those of an inactive subject. The subject's tissues will therefore bleed more during injury, and bruising will be more noticeable.

Inflammation

The next phase in the healing sequence is that of inflammation, summarized in Fig. 1.2. This may last from ten minutes to several days, depending on the amount of tissue damage which has occurred, but generally reaches its peak by one to three days.

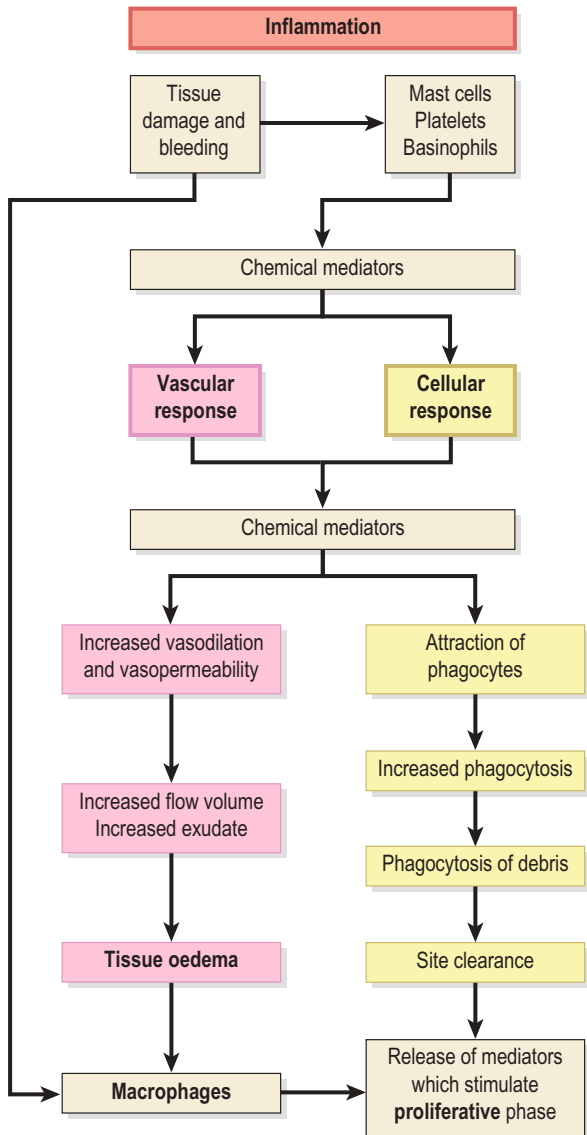


Figure 1.2 Inflammatory elements.

Vascular and chemical cascades occur in parallel to drive the inflammatory process.

Definition:

A *chemical cascade* (signalling cascade) is a series of chemical reactions. As one reaches its completion, it triggers the next in a type of 'chain reaction'.

The inflammatory response to soft tissue injury is much the same regardless of the nature of the injuring agent or the location of the injury itself. Inflammation is not simply a feature of soft tissue injuries, but also occurs when the body is infected, in immune reactions and with infarction. Some of the characteristics of the inflammatory response seen with soft tissue injury may be viewed as excessive and better suited to dealing with infection than healing injury.

The cardinal signs of inflammation are heat (*calor*), redness (*ruber*), swelling (*tumor*) and pain (*dolor*). These in turn give rise to the so-called fifth sign of inflammation: disturbance of function of the affected tissues (*functio laesa*).

Keypoint

Inflammation is often seen as undesirable. However, inflammation is the first stage of healing and so is a vital step on the road to recovery. The aim should be to prevent excessive inflammation and move the subject on through the phases of healing towards eventual full function.

Heat and redness

Heat and redness take a number of hours to develop, and are due to the opening of local blood capillaries and the resultant increased blood flow. Chemical and mechanical changes, initiated by injury, are responsible for the changes in blood flow.

Chemically, a number of substances act as mediators in the inflammatory process. The amines, including histamine and 5-hydroxytryptamine (5-HT or serotonin) are released from mast cells, red blood cells and platelets in the damaged capillaries and cause vessel dilatation and increased permeability. Kinins (physiologically active polypeptides) cause an increase in vascular permeability and stimulate the contraction of smooth muscle. They are found normally in an inactive state as kininogens. These

1 Healing

in turn are activated by the enzyme plasmin, and degraded by kininases.

The initial vasodilatation is maintained by prostaglandins. These are one of the arachidonic acid derivatives, formed from cell membrane phospholipids when cell damage occurs, and released when the kinin system is activated. The drugs aspirin and indometacin act to inhibit this change – hence their use as anti-inflammatory agents in sports and soft tissue injury treatment (see Treatment Note 1.1). The prostaglandins E1 and E2 will stimulate nociceptors and also promote

vasodilatation, blood-vessel permeability and lymph flow.

The complement system, consisting of a number of serum proteins circulating in an inactive form, is activated and has a direct effect on the cell membrane as well as helping to maintain vasodilatation. Various complement products are involved, and these are activated in sequence. Finally, polymorphs produce leukotrienes, which are themselves derived from arachidonic acid, help the kinins maintain vessel permeability.

Treatment note 1.1 Medication used in soft tissue injury

Although inflammation is an essential part of the healing process, sometimes it can be excessive. Anti-inflammatory treatments are designed to limit inflammation and interfere with the chemical processes described above. Two groups of drugs are generally used in the treatment of soft tissue injuries in this respect: corticosteroids and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Analgesics are used to limit pain, and may be used in isolation or together with anti-inflammatories.

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs

NSAIDs have both anti-inflammatory and pain relieving (analgesic) properties, causing both local (peripheral) and mild central effects. They inhibit the cyclo-oxygenase (COX) system, which has an important function in the cascade of chemicals driving the inflammatory process (see above) and works to block the production of prostaglandin. Two types are generally used, COX-1 and COX-2. As COX-1 also has an important function on the gastric mucosa, COX-1 inhibitors can lead to gastritis, and with long-term usage ulceration. COX-2 inhibitors have fewer effects on the gastric mucosa and so are better tolerated, but can increase the risk of thrombosis. NSAIDs are also available as creams and patches which can be used for superficial injury such as muscle

injuries, contusions, and knee arthritis. Drugs such as *aspirin*, *Volterol*, *Brufen* and *Naprosyn* are common oral NSAIDs.

NSAIDs can inhibit protein synthesis and affect satellite cell activity, detrimentally changing muscle repair (see Chapter 2). They may alter collagen formation and fibroblast proliferation, so long-term usage should generally be avoided. In addition, tenocyte action during tendon repair may be negatively affected, but pain reduced (Pollock 2017). The role of prostaglandins in bone repair is also a potential concern with NSAID usage, as osteoblast activity may be impaired, delaying callus maturation in bone (Wheeler and Batt 2005).

Targeting pain

Painkillers (analgesics) work on the peripheral or central nervous systems. Drugs such as *paracetamol* have painkilling (analgesic) and fever-reducing (antipyretic) effects, but do not generally reduce inflammation. This type of drug works by blocking a type of cell membrane receptor called a cannabinoid receptor, which drugs such as cannabis work on. *Codeine*, *morphine* and *ketamine* are more powerful painkillers and are opiates. They may be taken alone or combined with paracetamol. Opiate drugs are generally derived from the opium poppy or its synthetic equivalent (one of which is heroin) and are

Treatment note 1.1 *continued*

psychoactive compounds – ones which alter mood or consciousness. As such, one of their side effects is nausea and dizziness. Where pain is from a peripheral nociceptive stimulus, NSAIDs may be effective at targeting pain indirectly by reducing the inflammatory chemicals driving nociception. Their painkilling effect is generally non-addictive, unlike the narcotic group of painkilling drugs such as *morphine*, above.

Where neuropathic pain and central sensitization occurs, medications such as *Gabapentin* (an anti-epileptic) and *Pregabalin* may be chosen as these block the nociceptive signal by binding to the calcium channels on the nociceptor and reducing neurotransmitter release. These drugs can induce fatigue and have a sedative effect so subjects should be aware of this. Locally, counterirritant effects may be provided by massage or self-applied rubifacient rubs. These may reduce nociceptor transmission by depleting neurotransmitter activity.

Corticosteroids

Corticosteroids (such as *triamcinolone* and *hydrocortisone*) also reduce inflammation, but rather than targeting prostaglandin, they reduce activation of leucocytes and alter vascular permeability. These drugs tend to be injected to the site of a pathology and, although generally

effective at reducing both pain and inflammation in the short term, can have a number of negative effects. Inhibition of collagen synthesis may occur, impacting on tendon healing, an effect most studied in the case of tendinopathy presenting as tennis elbow (Coombes et al. 2010). Injecting into a contained region such as a joint can reduce synovial inflammation. However, cartilage matrix degradation may occur with prolonged usage in weight-bearing joints. Combining a corticosteroid with a local anaesthetic followed by a quick return to running is said to be detrimental to articular cartilage (Pollock 2017). Fat atrophy and alteration of skin pigmentation can also occur as a result of corticosteroid injection.

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Blood-flow changes also occur through mechanical alterations initiated by injury. Normally, the blood flow in the venules, in particular, is axial. The large blood proteins stay in the centre of the vessel, and the plasmatic stream, which has a lower viscosity, is on the outside in contact with the vessel walls. This configuration reduces peripheral resistance and aids blood flow.

In a damaged capillary, however, fluid is lost and so the axial flow slows. Marginalization occurs as the slower flow rate allows white blood cells to move into the plasmatic zone and adhere to the vessel walls. This, in turn, reduces the

lubricating effect of this layer and slows blood flow. The walls themselves become covered with a gelatinous layer, as endothelium changes occur.

Definition

Marginalization is the build-up of white blood cells (leukocytes) on blood-vessel walls at the site of an injury.

Some four hours after injury, diapedesis occurs as the white cells pass through the vessel walls into

1 Healing

the damaged tissue. The endothelial cells of the vessel contract, pulling away from each other and leaving gaps through which fluids and blood cells can escape (Fig. 1.3). Various substances, including histamine, kinins and complement factors, have been shown to produce this effect (Walter and Israel 1987).

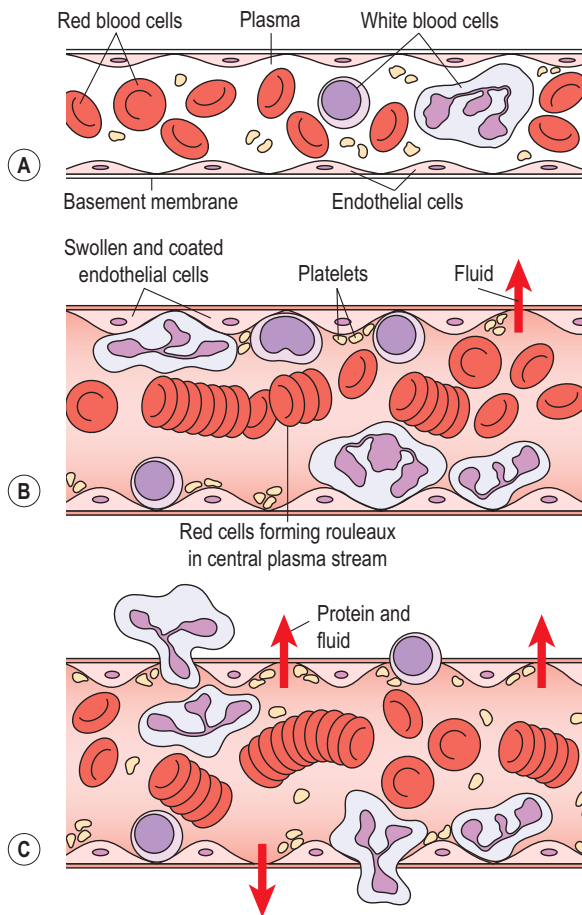


Figure 1.3 Vascular changes which occur in inflammation. (A) Blood vessel starts to dilate. (B) Dilated vessel showing marginalization. (C) White blood cells and fluid pass into tissue. From Evans, D.M.D. (1990a) *Inflammation and healing*. In *Cash's Textbook of General Medical and Surgical Conditions for Physiotherapists* (ed. P.A. Downie), 2nd edn. Faber and Faber, London. With permission.

Swelling

The normal pressure gradients inside and outside the capillary balance the flow of fluid leaving and entering the vessel (Fig. 1.4). The capillary membrane is permeable to water, and so water will be driven out into the interstitial fluid. However, because the tissue fluids usually contain a small amount of protein, and the blood contains a large amount, an osmotic pressure is created, which tends to suck water back from the tissue fluid and into the capillary once more. The magnitude of this osmotic pressure is roughly 25 mmHg. At the arteriole end of the capillary, the blood pressure (32 mmHg) exceeds the osmotic pressure and so tissue fluid is formed. At the venous end of the capillary, the blood pressure has reduced (12 mmHg) and so, because the osmotic pressure now exceeds this value, tissue fluid is reabsorbed back into the capillary.

During inflammation, the capillary bed opens and blood flow increases (heat and redness). The larger blood volume causes a parallel increase in blood pressure. Coupled with this, the tissue fluid now contains a large amount of protein, which has poured out from the more permeable blood vessels. This increased protein concentration causes a substantial rise in osmotic pressure, and this, together with the larger blood pressure in the capillary, forces fluid out into the interstitium, causing swelling.

Protein exudation in mild inflammation occurs from the venules only and is probably mediated by histamine. More severe inflammation, as a result of trauma, results in protein exudation from damaged capillaries as well.

During inflammation, lymphatic vessels open up and assist in the removal of excess fluid and protein. The lymph vessels are blind-ending capillaries which have gaps in their endothelial walls enabling protein molecules to move through easily. The lymph vessels lie within the tissue spaces, and have valves preventing the backward movement of fluid. Muscular contraction causes a pumping action on the lymph vessels and the

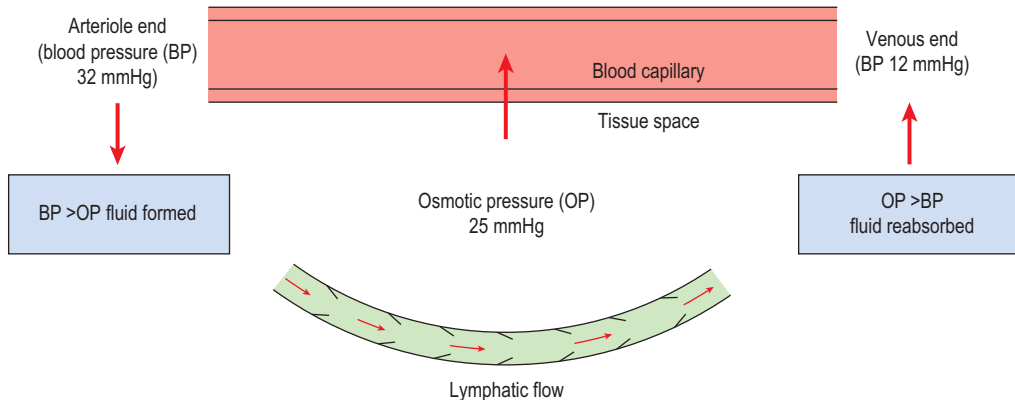


Figure 1.4 Formation and reabsorption of tissue fluid.

excess tissue fluid is removed to the subclavian veins in the neck.

Pain

Pain is the result of both sensory and emotional experiences, and is associated with tissue damage or the probability that damage will occur. It serves as a warning which may cause us to withdraw from a stimulus and so protect an injured body part. Unfortunately, pain often continues long after it has ceased to be a useful form of protection. Associated muscle spasm, atrophy, habitual postures, guarding and psychological factors all combine to make chronic pain a clinical state in itself.

Types of pain

Pain may be classified as somatogenic (acute or chronic), neurogenic or psychogenic. Chronic pain is traditionally said to last for more than six weeks, while acute pain is pain of sudden onset and lasts for less than six weeks. However, rather than distinct timescales, pain behavior is more appropriate as a classification.

Definition

Acute pain is traditionally said to have a sudden onset and lasts for less than six weeks, while chronic pain lasts for more than six weeks.

Musculoskeletal pain is not usually well localized – the surface site where the pain is felt rarely correlates directly to injured subcutaneous tissue. Generally, the closer an injured tissue is to the skin surface, the more accurate the patient can be at localizing it.

Deep pain is normally an aching, ill-defined sensation. It can radiate in a characteristic fashion, and may be associated with autonomic responses such as sweating, nausea, pallor and lowered blood pressure. Pain referral usually corresponds to segmental pathways, most often dermatomes. The extent of radiation largely depends on the intensity of the stimulus, with pain traditionally said to radiate distally, and rarely to cross the mid-line of the body (Cyriax 1982). In the clinic, however, these rules, while a useful guide, are often not adhered to rigidly.

Neurogenic pain is different again. Compression of a nerve root gives rise to ill-defined tingling, especially in the distal part of the dermatome supplied by the nerve. This is a pressure reaction, which quickly disappears when the nerve root is released. Greater pressure often causes the tingling to give way to numbness. Compression or tension to the dural sleeve covering the nerve root gives severe pain, generally over the whole dermatome. In contrast, pressure on a nerve trunk is conventionally said to cause little or no pain, but results in a shower of 'pins and needles' as the nerve compression is released. Pressure applied

1 Healing

to a superficial nerve distally gives numbness and some tingling, with the edge of the affected region being well defined.

Irritability

Irritability may be defined as ‘the vigour of activity which causes pain’ (Maitland 1991). It is determined by the degree of pain which the patient experiences, and the time this takes to subside, in relation to the intensity of activity or mechanical stimulation. The purpose of assessing irritability is to determine how much activity (joint mobilization, exercise, and so on) may be prescribed without exacerbating the patient’s symptoms.

An assessment of irritability may be made at the second treatment session. The amount of

movement which the patient was subjected to in the previous session is known, as is the discomfort that he or she feels now. These subjective feelings are then used to determine the intensity of the second treatment session. Similarly, at the beginning of each subsequent treatment session the irritability is again assessed.

Keypoint

Irritability is a measure of the amount of pain a patient experiences as a result of movement (including that of treatment). Irritability can be used to guide the type and intensity of treatment to avoid excessive post-treatment soreness.

Treatment note 1.2 Pain description in examination

During both the subjective examination and the objective examination (see Treatment Note 1.8, p. 53) the patient will usually describe pain as part of their experience. In addition to psychosocial factors (see below), both the type (nature) of pain and its behaviour are important factors in making an accurate clinical diagnosis, and a number of factors should be considered:

- ▶ When pain is decreasing, the condition is generally resolving; increasing pain suggests a worsening condition.
- ▶ Constant pain which does not change with time, alteration of static posture or activities may suggest a non-mechanical condition such as chemical irritation, tumours or visceral lesions.
- ▶ Where pain changes (episodic pain), the therapist should try to determine what activities make the pain worse (exacerbation) and what make it better (remission).
- ▶ The therapist should try to determine if the pain is associated with particular events (e.g. movements, visceral function), or time of day.

- ▶ Pain with activity which reduces with rest in general suggests a mechanical problem, irritating pain-sensitive structures.
- ▶ Morning pain which eases with movement may indicate chronic inflammation which takes time to build up and reduces with movement.

The description of pain itself may indicate the structure causing it (see Table 1.1) and the

Table 1.1 Pain descriptions and related structures

Type of pain	
Cramping, dull, aching, worse with resisted movement	Muscle
Dull, aching, worse with passive movement	Ligament, joint capsule
Sharp, shooting	Nerve root
Sharp, lightning-like, travelling	Nerve
Burning, pressure-like, stinging, with skin changes	Sympathetic nerve
Deep, nagging, poorly localized	Bone
Sharp, severe, unable to take weight	Fracture
Throbbing, diffuse	Vasculature

Source: Magee (2002) and Petty and Moore (2001) with permission.

Treatment note 1.2 *continued*

behaviour of the pain on physical examination clarifies the picture.

Recording pain

The intensity of pain may be recorded on a visual analogue scale (VAS). The patient is asked to indicate the pain description or number which best represents their pain. Where a 10 cm line is used the distance from the left of the scale to the point marked by the patient may be measured in millimetres and used as a numerical value (Fig. 1.5).

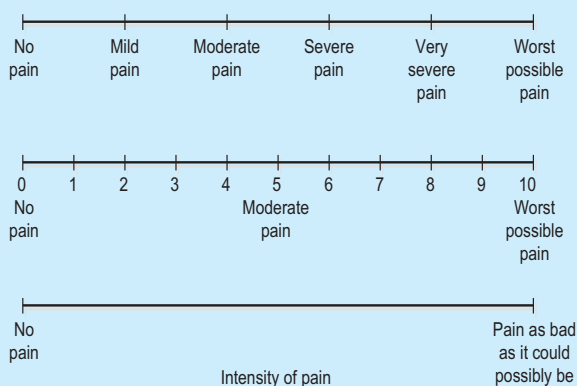


Figure 1.5 Visual analogue scales (VAS) used in pain description. From Petty and Moore (2001) with permission.

Red flags

It is important for the therapist to appreciate when pain and other symptoms may suggest serious pathology which requires medical investigation – so-called ‘red flags’ (Table 1.2). Where the patient has persistent pain and is generally unwell, the indication is that a pathology other than a musculoskeletal condition may exist. In addition, changes in bladder and bowel habits, alteration in vision or gross changes in gait all require further investigation.

Table 1.2 Red flags in sport examination indicating medical investigation

System/ possible pathology	Pain behaviour
Cancer	Persistent night pain
	Constant (24 hour) pain
	Unexplained weight loss (e.g. 4–6 kg in 10 days)
	Loss of appetite
	Unusual lumps or growths
	Sudden persistent fatigue
Cardiovascular	Past history of carcinoma
	Shortness of breath
	Dizziness
	Pain or feeling of heaviness in the chest
	Pulsating sensations in the body
Gastrointestinal/ genitourinary	Discoloration in the feet
	Persistent swelling with no history of injury
	Frequent or severe abdominal pain
	Frequent heartburn or indigestion
	Frequent nausea or vomiting
	Change in bladder or bowel habits
Neurological	Unusual menstruation
	Changes in hearing
	Frequent or severe headache
	Problems in swallowing or changes in speech
	Gait disturbance, or problems with balance/coordination
	Drop attacks (fainting)
	Sudden weakness

Source: Magee et al. (2002) and Waddell, G., Feder, G. and Lewis, M. (1997) Systematic reviews of bed rest and advice to stay active for acute low back pain. *British Journal of General Practice*, **47**, 647–652. With permission.