



Zoe Birch is a Chartered Physiotherapist and founder of PhysioMotion, which operate four London clinics as well as providing physiotherapy at home. We remain very grateful to Zoe for writing articles for the Health and Wellbeing section and in this edition she gives some excellent advice about exercising.

ZERO TO HERO!

Why suddenly increasing your exercise could be bad.

It's that time of year when there are greater opportunities for outdoor activities. Better weather is on the way in the UK and summer holidays abroad beckon.

This is great! But after being relatively sedentary over the winter months, I have noticed an increase in patients that have lower limb or back related problems. This is caused by a sudden influx of outdoor activity such as walking, running and cycling that we call 'overuse injury'.



The sun comes out and some of us head for long days in the hills.

This comes about by suddenly increasing the load you put your body through by time or weight resulting in inflammation in the central "belly" section of muscles, tendons, bursa (sacks of fluid around joints), bones or nerves. This causes localised pain brought on by altered movement or what we call "gait pattern".

Other symptoms include:

- Localised swelling
- Tenderness to the touch of the affected area
- Warmth to the touch
- Redness
- Impaired function of that body part
- Stiffness in the affected area



A bicycle made for two enables alternating rest period for one.

You would think by resting for a short period and letting your symptoms reduce this should sort the problem. Unfortunately with this particular problem as soon as you return to the same level of activity, the symptoms will reappear and can progressively get worse if not sorted properly.

There are four stages of an overuse injury:

1. Discomfort disappears during warm-up
2. Discomfort may disappear during warm-up but reappears at the end of the activity
3. Discomfort that gets worse during the activity
4. Pain or discomfort all the time

Therefore to get rid of your symptoms we need to address:

- Muscle weakness
- Poor movement pattern
- Inflexibility
- Muscle imbalance

An assessment with a physiotherapist or coach in your chosen activity would be beneficial to help you identify what could be causing an overuse injury and provide you with a rehabilitation programme and/or assistance with correcting your technique.

Other factors that you need to consider depending on the activity:

- **Walking or running:** correct or in good condition footwear, slowly increasing the distance or speed by no more than 10% at a time and pick an appropriate terrain for your ability and fitness level.
- **Cycling:** correct bike set up and frame size, tyres pumped up, chain oiled and slowly increasing the distance and climb.

To avoid this problem, it is advisable to have a strengthening and mobility programme during the colder months, and continue alongside your 'fair weather' activity, that you perform at least twice a week, provided by a physiotherapist, coach or personal trainer. This would ensure that it is tailored to the activities that you want to perform in the warm months or climates.



Sudden high impact movements can cause soft tissue inflammation.

So my advice is to catch up on your cold weather exercise programme and dovetail this with preparations for more exercise over the summer months.

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