



SPORTS / EXERCISE / FITNESS

I Say You Can Train Even When You Are Injured!

Franco Columbu, DC; Karen Lipsky, MA

A record-setting weightlifter, former two-time Mr. Olympia, actor and director, Franco Columbu is a native of Sardinia who has maintained a successful chiropractic practice in Southern California for years. He has a reputation for helping athletes, entertainers and others recover after previous treatment has failed. His proactive methods and philosophy are addressed in this column.

Dr. Lipsky received her Master's Degree from Pacific Oaks College, and her practice integrates spirituality, depth psychology, dream work and astrology.

The last thing an injured athlete wants to hear from his or her doctor is, "Stop exercising." When treating injured patients, I believe it is important to get them back into the gym as soon as possible. I believe the body can heal better when the mind is not busy with depression. In my many years of training to be a champion, I learned that success was due 50 percent to physical training and 50 percent to mental outlook. Because of this, when treating patients, 50 percent of my treatment is the actual physical treatment and manipulation, and 50 percent is motivating them to develop an individualized corrective training program that includes nutrition, vitamins and minerals.

One example of this type of treatment involves Robert, a 30-year-old man who owns and teaches at a karate studio/gym in Los Angeles. He sustained a lumbar and sacroiliac injury while teaching. Over the next nine months, he consulted with 20 professionals - from orthopedists to physical therapists and chiropractors. All of them told him not to train. Some even told him that he would never be able to practice karate again, and that he should sell his gym, find a new line of work and take a desk job.

This was devastating news for Robert, whose entire life revolved around his gym. Fortunately, a fellow martial artist and patient of mine took a class at his gym. They started talking, and he

suggested to Robert, "Go see Franco."

Robert scheduled his first appointment; he arrived with a stack of X-rays, and in a completely demoralized, hopeless state. He had not trained for nine months. He told me all about his injury. He was afflicted with spasms in his hamstrings and calf muscles. During the physical exam, I determined that he was suffering from a combination of sacroiliac inflammation and fixation, as well as an unstable femur caused by a muscle imbalance developed from a common karate exercise: the side kick. His iliopsoas muscle was weak, as were the muscles that protect that movement.

I felt I understood Robert's problem, and I believed I could help him. I told him, "You may improve very fast, but you have to go back to the gym and start training right away, starting tomorrow." When he heard this, he was so excited that he jumped off the table, exclaiming, "My problem is now 30 percent better - and you haven't even adjusted me yet!"

Treatment included acupressure on his low back area and kinesiology work. I have very strong thumbs when I push, so this is generally painful, yet all I heard from the patient was "Ahh, it's getting better, doc ... oww, it's getting better, doc." I replied, "It can be even better if you breathe and relax while I'm working on you." After I treated Robert, we talked, and I understood the root of his injury: He was raising his leg too high during the side kick.

I recommended exercises to train the rest of his body, while allowing the injury to rest. I also gave him five corrective exercises to perform: hamstring stretches; calf stretches; anterior calf raises (to strengthen the antagonist muscle of the calf, the *anterior tibialis*); leg extensions; and standing side leg raises (to strengthen the *gluteus medius*). Because his left iliopsoas was weaker than his right, I advised him to perform five sets of 15 reps on the left side and only two sets of 15 reps on the right, four times a week, until both muscles were equal.

Robert was highly motivated, and I believed he would train exactly the way I recommended. We also talked about coordinating his nutritional, vitamin and mineral intake. I asked him to bring in all the supplements, drugs and powders he had been given to treat the injury when he returned for his next appointment.

Carrying a box with 25 bottles of drugs, supplements and herbs, Robert returned for his second appointment looking and reporting he was feeling much better. We put all the bottles on top of the adjusting table. I scanned his supplements while asking myself, "What does he need most?" and "What does he need next?" I wanted to limit his intake and concentrate on what could help him heal the most. I increased Robert's calcium and magnesium, and also gave him other minerals to balance this.

After throwing half of his bottles away, Robert asked, "When can I start doing side kicks again?" I told him, "I want you to learn a modified side kick, one that will not aggravate your injury - one that is better than the original." After I treated him, we went over his exercise program and made some changes. I also gave him exercises to strengthen his compensatory muscles.

When I am adjusting, my hands tell me what the body needs. I immediately felt that Robert was taking exactly the right balance of vitamins and minerals to promote the best possible healing. By the third treatment, his condition was stabilized, and I told him he could start teaching again right away. After the treatment, he showed me how he was doing his exercises. I made some changes and gave him some new exercises to do. Right after this, Robert returned to work at his gym full-time and resumed competition. It has been seven years since I treated him; his problem never came back.

This is one of many stories that have become common in my office. As a chiropractor, I believe that to better understand sports injuries (for any type of sport), it helps to:

- engage in a variety of sports activities on a weekly basis, including weight training;
- develop a complete understanding of the functions of the muscles and the skeletal system;
- seek your own nutritional program that includes food, vitamins and minerals; and
- continually work on improving your own health.



One of my favorite things about helping people heal is watching their return to health; it is deeply satisfying to me. They also inevitably refer others, which is the road to success in my practice.

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