



ILLUSTRATIONS BARRY MAITLAND-STUART

# Rite of Recovery

Get back on the trails and rebuild fitness with clear guidance from **COACH NEVILLE BEETON**.

**F**ew runners have escaped the frustration of injuries, but it certainly need not mean the end of our world. Instead this can be a golden opportunity to take time off to rebuild ourselves and return to running stronger and better.

Once upon a time, there was a little chick called Chicken Little who lived on a farmyard in the countryside. One day, Chicken Little went to the woods. He stopped by an oak tree. Suddenly a tiny acorn dropped from the tree – wheeeeeeeeee! And hit Chicken Little on the head – BONK! Unfortunately, Chicken Little didn't see the acorn. He looked up

the clear blue sky. "Oh, no!" he said "The sky is falling, I must tell the king."

~ From the story of Chicken Little.

Injuries – like the acorn – can seemingly strike suddenly from the sky, and like Chicken Little, we may feel the sky has fallen on our head.

Dealing with an injury, rehabilitation, and rebuilding your running is as much a mental process as a physical process.

## Mental fight

The first step with any injury is to accept it and deal with it. If the pain doesn't disappear after a few days, then you are officially injured, and staying in denial will only prolong it.

I have noticed similarities in this process of moving through from denial to acceptance of an injury to the five stages in bereavement, which are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Let's have a look at these, understanding the process can help us accept it faster and get on with rebuilding our running.

**Denial.** I see this with many runners who try running through an injury. It starts off with a twinge, becomes a consistent pain on the run, and then may become a debilitating pain even when not running. At the heart of denial lies the hope that somehow the injury will magically disappear.

**Anger.** "It's just not fair!" cries the runner. This anger can be self-directed, with the runner blaming herself for not recognising the warning signs and stopping earlier. The anger may also be taken out on family and friends.

After 41 years of running and 18 years of coaching, I can testify to the fact that there is nobody as grumpy as an injured runner, myself included.

**Bargaining.** "If only I had seen a doctor, physio, chiro, or bio!" wails the runner. In this phase, the runner starts to take control of her situation, and will seek professional advice, visit a sports doctor, physios, chiro, or bio.

Quick tip: It sometimes helps to see more than one person as a combination of using a chiro and physio for instance can be very effective. Many injuries require a multi-pronged approach.

**Depression.** It takes time to recover from an injury and rebuild. For months, your days have been filled with running, dreams of great trails and races to come. Suddenly, there are unfilled hours in the day with seemingly nothing to look forward to. The answer is to use this opportunity

to do things you don't normally have time for, turning the spare time into a positive.

I once coached a runner who had a fractured femur after a hard fall and was on crutches for months. At one stage we went for a 4km walk on a horse bridle path, chatting about all the great races she would still do, while she hobbled on her crutches next to me. I will never forget her happy face and the joy she took in this.

**Acceptance.** At this stage you have received professional medical advice, you are following a rehab programme as prescribed, have accepted the postponement of your dreams, have new dreams and are working actively to rebuild your running.

## Physical maintenance

It is wise to try to identify what caused the injury. It may be from over-training, over-racing, or tackling a race when inadequately prepared for it. Or it may be the result of a biomechanical problem.

Having identified it not only makes it easier to fix the injury, but also to prevent it happening again.

Your rehab programme will mostly precede your new training programme in which you start to rebuild your training to previous levels. In this rehab stage you must be guided by the advice provided by whoever is treating you. It may include some strength training, swimming or pool running, physio, massage, and so on.

In the early stage of rebuilding you can use cross-training to increase fitness with minimal impact. This is a way of fast-tracking your progress so that once you start running you are already fit. (Continued next page...)

Possible cross-training programme in early rebuilding phase

Monday	20-30 min swimming or pool running
Tuesday	20 min on stationary bike
Wednesday	Rest
Thursday	20-30 min swimming or pool running
Friday	Rest
Saturday	30-60 min easy cycle or stationary bike
Sunday	30-40min swimming or pool running

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The crew at Pinnacle Rock, Cobham NR, Drakensberg. See p46.

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There will be some overlap in these methods as you start with rehab and transition to running.

- Running on an **anti-gravity treadmill** enables you to reduce impact, to avoid overloading your legs.
- **Pool running** mimics your running action, but isn't weight-bearing, with zero impact enabling you to get in really good sessions.
- **Swimming** is always great for recovery, but is not as effective as pool running, as it doesn't mimic running.
- **Cycling and spinning** can be useful, but some injuries won't allow it.
- Great care has to be taken if doing **strength training**, as there is a chance of injury when using equipment incorrectly or doing too much. It would be best to do this under the guidance of a personal trainer.

**Getting (re)started**

A weekly schedule you may want to follow is on page 61. It incorporates these cross-training sessions during your rehab and early rebuilding phase. You will be guided by your medical

practitioner as to the duration of these sessions and for how many weeks. All sessions are done at an **easy effort**.

**Back to running!**

Your patience in seeking medical attention, doing rehab and the above cross-training is rewarded with your first run. It is hard to say exactly what the first run or rebuilding phase will comprise as it will vary depending on how fit the person still is, the nature of the injury and their running goals.

For the purposes of this article, we will sketch two three-week scenarios. The first, for Runner A, who has not run for three months, did rehab, but was unable to do cross training and who is thus unfit and has perhaps gained weight.

And the second for Runner B, who has not run for three months, but has done rehab and some cross-training such as pool running and cycling to maintain fitness. In both examples, runners should use the breathing test to gauge their effort.

These should all be easy sessions and breathing should be easy, and you

should be able to talk normally.

At the end of these three weeks, Runner A will be easing into it and require perhaps another four weeks before starting a base programme, while Runner B will be able to commence with a base programme after the three weeks.

Rebuilding your running requires patience and rethinking your plans for the next few months. But time flies and before you know it, you will be out on the trails where you belong.

*"Are you sure the sky fell on your head?" they said. "Well, maybe it was an acorn," said Chicken Little. And they chased him all the way home to the farmyard.*

**NEVILLE BEETON**

Midrand-based coach for runners of all abilities.

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**UNFIT: Runner A** has not run for three months, did rehab, but was unable to do cross-training, and has lost fitness

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3
Monday	15 min easy jogging with walks	Rest	Rest
Tuesday	15 min easy jogging with walks	20 min easy jogging with walks	3km easy run
Wednesday	Rest	30 min easy jogging with walks	5km easy run
Thursday	15 min easy jogging with walks	30 min easy jogging with walks	3km easy run
Friday	Rest	Rest	Rest
Saturday	20 min easy jogging with walks	30 min easy jogging with walks	5km easy run
Sunday	15 min easy jogging with walks	20 min easy jogging with walks	3km easy run or rest if tired



**FIT: Runner B** has not run for three months, but has done rehab and some cross-training to maintain fitness

DAY	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3
Monday	5km easy run	Rest	Rest
Tuesday	5km easy run	5km easy run	8km easy run
Wednesday	Rest	8km easy run	5km easy run
Thursday	5km easy run	5km easy run	8km easy run
Friday	Rest	Rest	Rest
Saturday	6-8km easy run	10-12km easy run	12-15km easy run
Sunday	4km easy run or rest if tired	5km easy run or rest if tired	8km easy run or rest if tired

