

**RUNNING**

With a global reputation in sports injury rehabilitation, Phil Mack – who represented GB and South Africa at triathlon – is one of the UK’s most experienced and respected sports physiotherapists. After spending 15 years as a physiotherapist and sports scientist in professional rugby, including stints with the Springboks, Ulster and Leicester Tigers, he now has five sports injury clinics in Edinburgh and one in his home town of Peebles in the Scottish Borders (thephysiotherapyclinic.com).

Mack told OutdoorFitness: “It’s fair to say swimming, cycling and running each have typical associated injuries. For example, rotator cuff tendinopathy with swimming, anterior knee pain with cycling and ilio-tibial band (ITB) syndrome with running. It’s also well known that as triathletes strive to improve their performance by extensive training in each of the three disciplines, there’s a tendency to collectively overtrain which can lead to injury. Around 60% of triathlon injuries we see at our sports injury clinics are from collective overtraining, with 30% biomechanical or technique errors and 10% acute trauma.”

However, Mack says that 85-90% of all triathlete injuries his team assesses and treats are typical running injuries such as ITB syndrome, Achilles tendinitis and so-called “runners knee”. Mack explained that there are two main causes for these types of injuries developing: “First, there may be a fault in your biomechanics, such as your running gait, running shoes or training regime. Second, if you are not following a sensible progression and volume with your training, or your recovery is insufficient, then you could be running with fatigued muscles which are important for maintaining a good running gait; such as your gluteal muscles, for example. Both swimming and cycling can cause fatigue in these muscles and alter your running gait which can progress to injury.”

Mack’s advice to triathletes new to the sport is: “If you experience any of these injuries it is important you find an experienced sports physiotherapist who can help you establish the cause, treat the injury and provide advice with your training and recovery to prevent further injuries.”

The physio further explains that during 15 years of competing in triathlon and duathlon, he learnt to listen to his body, and he believes that the resolution of triathlon injuries is about establishing the cause and switching the emphasis of training rather than ignore the

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first signs of a developing injury, I would immediately adjust my training, reducing training with the aggravating discipline and perhaps place more emphasis on the other two disciplines. For example, I went through a bad spell of Achilles tendinitis when I wore the wrong type of training shoes. At the same time as correcting the shoes, I spent more time in the pool and limited running until my Achilles had recovered. I rarely lost any fitness as a result of this adjustment.”

“Like Phil,” says Spiteri, “I’m also good at listening to my body, which is key to keeping healthy. I think the fact that I have to juggle my medical career and sporting career results in me having to miss some sessions due to time commitments and due to fatigue, hence my body does not get overloaded and injured. The fact that I have been into sports since I was a young girl has also given me a strong base to build on and this keeps me relatively injury free. Nowadays, being so aware of the role that injuries play in sports, I also realise how important general conditioning and technique are.”

**CONCLUSION**

In a recent review of triathlon injuries, Dr Bocharova pointed out that: “Triathletes spend more time training per week than any other athlete involved in individual sport, such as cycling, swimming, or running and therefore, have a higher incidence of injury than any of the single-sport participants. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that training for the multi-sport event can be beneficial due to the cross-training. Many triathletes have grown up participating in the individual sports, therefore their potentially faulty biomechanics in each of the disciplines must be considered as a most probable source of injury.”

Although there are training-associated injury risks for triathletes, it appears that many injuries can be avoided with a little forward planning, by being adaptable and by recognising that there are sports professionals out there who are able to help you to not only navigate the injury-associated obstacles, but also to improve your performance.

