



Firstly its important to outline the 3 phases of soft tissue injury and healing response.

**1 Acute Stage** – This stage can last up to 5 days depending on the nature and severity of the injury. During this stage there is disruption of the nutrient rich blood flow and cells begin to die. The dying cells release chemicals which initiates the inflammatory response. This process is usually characterized by heat, swelling, pain and redness. Intervention such as Massage is contraindicated during this stage and training should be avoided.

**2 – Sub-Acute (or Repair) Stage** – This stage can last up to 21 days during which time inflammation decreases the process of tissue repair takes place. This new tissue is often called scar tissue. Massage during this stage can accelerate the healing process and very light training can be introduced.

**3 - Chronic (or remodelling) Stage** – Lasting for up to 2 years scar tissue will continue to form and harden. The area of injury may still be susceptible to further damage under heavy loading. Massage at this stage is highly beneficial in helping ‘re-align’ the scar tissue in the direction of the muscle fibres – thus making the area more efficient and less vulnerable to further damage.

During the Acute stage the POLICE protocol should be followed (this is an updated version of the acronym PRICE),

P – Protect from further damage

OL – Optimal Loading i.e. continue to keep the area of injury mobilised but without overloading it

I – Use Ice to reduce swelling and pain (20 mins every 2 hrs)

C – Compression helps reduce swelling

E – Elevation helps reduce blood supply to the affected area

NSAID’s (i.e. Ibuprofen) can also be used to help relieve pain and reduce inflammation but prolonged use can inhibit the repair process.

It’s never too late to use Ice on an injury. However, because it reduces the blood supply prolonged use can also inhibit the repair process.

Once into the Sub- Acute stage Contrast Bathing should be considered to help accelerate the healing process. This involves alternating hot and cold applications to the damaged area. A good way to achieve this is to use a Hot Water Bottle and Ice Pack. Follow the protocol below over a period of 10 to 14 days,

2-3 days - 1 min heat, 4 mins cold (x4 three times a day)

3-4 days – 2 min heat, 2 min cold (x4 three times a day)

5-7 days – 4 min heat, 1 min cold (x4 three times a day)

Beyond the Sub-Acute stage a period of rehabilitation (and phased return to training) should be prescribed taking into consideration the nature and severity of the injury.