

Your Mental Health and Your Recovery

The Connection Between Mind and Physical Healing

1 Why Mental Health Matters in Physical Rehab

Injury, pain, and the limitations they impose are genuinely difficult. Feeling frustrated, anxious, low, or demoralised is a normal and understandable response — not a sign of weakness. The emotional weight of being injured is real, and it deserves to be acknowledged.

Mental health and physical recovery are deeply interconnected. Anxiety and depression increase pain sensitivity, reduce motivation to exercise, impair sleep, and can slow healing. Taking care of your mental wellbeing is not separate from your rehabilitation — it is part of it.

Your emotional response to injury and pain is as much a part of your rehabilitation as any exercise. It is valid, it matters, and it can be worked on.

2 How Mental Health Affects Recovery

Mental Health Factor	How It Affects Rehab	What Helps
Anxiety about re-injury	Leads to movement avoidance — prevents tissue adaptation and recovery	Graded exposure; understanding pain science; clinician reassurance
Low mood or depression	Reduces motivation and adherence; increases pain sensitivity	Social connection; structured routine; exercise itself is a proven antidepressant
Fear-avoidance behaviour	Catastrophising pain signals leads to further deconditioning	Education; CBT-based approaches; pacing and graded activity
Stress	Elevates cortisol, increases inflammation, disrupts sleep	Breathing techniques; relaxation; addressing stressors directly

3 The Role of Exercise for Mental Health

Exercise is one of the most consistently evidence-supported treatments for mild-to-moderate anxiety and depression. Your rehabilitation exercises are not just healing your body — they are actively supporting your mental health at the same time.

Effect of Exercise	Evidence
Mood improvement	Aerobic exercise increases serotonin, dopamine, and endorphin release

Anxiety reduction	Regular exercise reduces physiological arousal and worry
Self-efficacy	Successfully completing rehab exercises builds confidence and sense of control
Sleep quality	Regular physical activity improves sleep onset and depth

4 Supporting Your Mental Wellbeing During Rehab

Strategy	How It Helps	Simple Starting Point
Talk to someone	Isolation amplifies emotional difficulty	Tell your clinician how you are feeling — they can help or refer you
Set small daily goals	Builds momentum and a sense of progress	Complete one exercise; take one walk; tick one thing off your list
Limit pain-focused attention	Constantly monitoring pain increases its perceived intensity	Schedule distraction — music, podcasts, social contact during exercise
Celebrate small wins	Progress in rehab is often non-linear — small gains matter	Keep a simple log of what you can do now vs. one month ago

5 Key Takeaways

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

Your feelings about your injury are valid — and they are part of your recovery. It is completely understandable to feel frustrated, anxious, or low when you are in pain and unable to do the things you love. Acknowledging those feelings — rather than pushing them aside — is a healthy and important first step.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2

Exercise is medicine for both body and mind. Every time you complete a rehabilitation exercise, you are not only helping your tissue to heal — you are boosting the chemicals in your brain that improve mood, reduce anxiety, and help you sleep. Small, consistent effort adds up to meaningful change.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

You do not have to do this alone. Your clinical team is there to support your whole wellbeing — not just your physical recovery. If you are struggling with your mood, your anxiety, or your motivation, please tell them. Small adjustments to your programme, or a referral to additional support, can make a real difference.

If you are struggling significantly with your mental health, please speak to your GP or clinician. You do not have to manage this alone.