

# Dr. Alex Diaz Consulting

Sports Counseling, Organizational Counseling, Somatic Psychotherapy, Psychotherapist

## Spring Newsletter

Welcome to an EXCITING first quarter for me!

I am very pleased to share with all of you that we have re-designed our website. Dr. Alex Diaz Consulting is now a more integrated webpage aimed at learning strategies to manage stress. Regardless of whether you are an individual dealing with life stressors, an athlete hoping to reach your peak performance, a student having to meet high academic expectations, or a professional business person wanting to find strategies to improve relationships and raise productivity, Dr. Diaz Consulting teaches proven stress management coping skills that enhance resilience, elevate emotional intelligence, and improve performance.

Dr. Diaz Consulting embraces a holistic teaching approach to achieve improved performance. Latest academic research supports the synergetic results in human functioning when Western and Eastern healing philosophies are combined to achieve emotional balance and improved decision making. Dr. Diaz's doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology with Concentration in Somatic Psychology places him in the extremely selected group of academically trained professionals who has over 17 years of practical experience helping clients incorporate the benefits of such a holistic approach.

Much has been learned about the wonderful functioning of our brain. Logic and structure are just small functions of what the brain allows us to do. Emotional intelligence, focus, attuned communication, and social attunement are equal by-products of our brain. These traits can be trained and enhanced. With practice, human functioning becomes more congruent with what we hope to achieve as individuals in society.

We look forward to hearing from you and I hope you stay tune to our blogs and other forms of social media communication.



### **THE MENTAL SIDE OF SPORTS INJURY REHABILITATION**

The physical demands required to practice a sport quite often lead to injuries. Last year, 1,5 million young athletes incurred in some kind of a serious injury. Strains and sprains, about 500,000, are the most common sport injuries, followed by fractures and contusions. Once an athlete suffers a sport injury, physical rehabilitation plays a positive and significant role in helping the athlete return to the field, track, or course. As the athlete commits to the rehabilitation process, he/she will notice physical improvements and, in due time, be back to practicing his/her favorite sport. However, injury rehabilitation is not just about addressing the physical pain. Injured athletes often experience a wide array of emotions that, unless properly managed, may impact not only in the rehabilitation process, but also the chances of successfully returning to completion.

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Once an injury occurs, emotions invade the athlete's mind. Regardless of the kind of injury, the athlete is suddenly forced to stop from participating in his/her favorite sport. The longer the rehabilitation process is, the stronger the emotions that are experienced. A sport injury can become an emotionally devastated moment for any athlete. Dreams of remaining in the varsity team, or hopes to receive a full scholarship ride to a top division school may have just become a gone possibility. At the time when education is running at exorbitant



costs, parents may also experience a sudden emotional shock. The rehabilitation process is not just a physical demand, but equally important, a mental exercise that will demand focus, emotional determination, and positive reinforcement not only for the athlete, but also for the parents.

Addressing the emotional aspect in sport rehabilitation has many positive benefits. Setbacks, like an injury, is likely to challenge the mental makeup of the athlete. Chances are that the athlete will be able to come back and fully participate in his/her sport again. However, the athlete's chosen mental approach to overcome this difficult moment can become a learned lesson for dealing with future sport and life challenges. It is in the athlete's best interest to take full responsibility to embrace the mental side of sport rehabilitation as it will lead to developing a higher level of confidence knowing that he/she was able to successfully navigate the challenges and disappointments of a sport injury and return to play.

Injuries bring a wide array of emotions. An athlete will feel frustration, anger, sadness, depression, nervousness, and even hopelessness. All these emotions may be experienced one after another or some of them all at once. The athlete's routine has just been broken and the sports goals need now to be temporarily put on a shelf. There is no worse experience for any athlete than sitting on a chair and thinking "why me?" The athlete will try to find answers and, in the process, become emotionally overtaken by the hopelessness of not being able to participate in his/her favorite sport. The longer the rehabilitation process, the more likely the athlete will go into an emotional tsunami of experiences.

Some of the emotions are related to the uncertainty of whether the athlete will be able to compete again, and how soon that will happen. Also, the athlete may fear being replaced by another athlete and losing his/her place in the team. Additionally, there is also the fear of not being able to achieve the top physical fitness prior to the injury or, even worse, the fear of being re-injured. Parents may directly or indirectly make this challenging experience even more difficult by undermining or short-cutting the rehabilitation process in hope of raising the athlete's emotional state. Unfortunately, this approach often leads to not only increasing the chances for recurring injuries, but more importantly, to missing the opportunity to build a stronger emotional state that will help the athlete cope with future challenges.

There are important and useful mental approaches that positively impact injury rehabilitation for both, athletes and parents.

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### Athletes

- It is perfectly fine to have emotions concerning the injury. It is an unexpected set-back. However, the same mental fortitude that led he/she to succeed in sports can be applied toward the rehabilitation process. A positive mental attitude directed toward rehabilitation will promote quicker healing.



- Set specific and realistic goals directed toward rehabilitation. Make sure you follow proper physical, dietitian and rest guidance. The athletes must commit to meeting those goals even when progress is not moving as fast as he/she wishes.
- Surround yourself with encouraging people that will support the recovery process. There may be times when the athlete will feel down and discouraged. By maintaining contact with teammates, coach and/or even taking the role of mentoring other players will bring positive and fulfilling feelings.
- Practice positive imagery. Athletes have successfully used this mental strategy to bring faster healing. The body has gone through a lot of stress, both physically and emotionally. To alleviate stress, mental imagery helps to lessen stress and facilitates rapid recovery.
- Another strategy to lessen stress is to practice breathing relaxation. Athletes are encouraged to lie down on a coach and place a light object on the belly. With each inhale, push the object up and then exhale. Repeat this exercise for five minutes and bring attention to how the body begins to calm down.

### Parents

- Empathy goes a long way in the recovery process. The athletes need a secured presence for support, encourage, and understanding. It is also important for the parents to remain in contact with other sport parents and coaches for guidance and support, as well.
- Take a pro-active approach to understand as much as you can about the injury, its potential outcome after surgery, the needed rehabilitation program while also maintaining contact with the athletic trainer, physical trainer and coaches. It is important to remain connected with these professionals in order to be truthful and supportive during the entire process.

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- It is normal that the athlete goes through emotional ups and downs. It will hard on them as it will on the parents. At this moment, it is important to remain positive and encourage the athlete to follow with professional recommendations and goals. It is detrimental for the athletes to minimize recovery time as it will only increase the chances of getting hurt, again.
- If the athlete struggles with the recovery process and it is taking a big emotional toll, keep the professionals informed and consider seeking mental health sport counseling. As hard a recovery process is, the athlete may benefit by addressing his/her emotional struggles with a separate professional that will provide mental health support.

As unfortunate a sport injury is, there is a silver lining behind successfully addressing the recovery of a sport injury. The athlete will have gained the be more confident after having adhered to a set of goals, remain positive, be patient, seek help, and build mental toughness that will be useful when dealing with future sport and life challenges.



**Stress is negative AND positive.** The way we interpret the outside world leads our bodies to physiologically respond by mobilizing stress hormones. Re-framing negative scenarios and think of positive outcomes will lessen stress responses.

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**Don't miss our blog post:**

[How do athletes enhance their self-confidence?](#)

[Are you looking backwards or forward?](#)

[How do elite athletes close matches?](#)

[Is having expectations helpful or hurtful to your performance](#)

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