

# Psychosocial Aspects of Rehabilitation in Sports



Tracey Covassin, PhD, ATC<sup>a,\*</sup>, Erica Beidler, MEd, ATC<sup>a</sup>,  
Jennifer Ostrowski, PhD, ATC<sup>b</sup>, Jessica Wallace, MA, ATC<sup>a</sup>

## KEYWORDS

• Psychosocial skills • Rehabilitation • Injury • Psychological recovery

## KEY POINTS

- Awareness of the psychosocial response to athletic injury helps clinicians to effectively assist patients with the healing and recovery process.
- Patients with high trait anxiety tend to have high state anxiety and this may influence thoughts and feelings about the injury and healing process.
- Fear of reinjury can have a negative influence on the rehabilitation process because of concerns about returning to preinjury level, especially as the patient gets closer to return-to-play.
- Effective communication skills in the athletic training setting are a key component to patient care.
- Clinicians must focus on the injured person, rather than the physical injury. There are several psychosocial techniques to choose from to ensure a holistic treatment of each individual.

## INTRODUCTION: NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

Injury is an inherent consequence of athletic participation. Athletic injury not only affects patients' physical well-being, but also their self-concept, self-esteem, belief system, values, commitments, and emotional equilibrium.<sup>1</sup> Often, sports medicine professionals focus on the physical damage from injury, while ignoring the psychosocial aspects of injury and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with an injury.<sup>2</sup> Athletic injury can be an imposing source of stress, and patients often experience feelings of tension, confusion, hostility, loneliness, fear, irritability, and anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, feelings of guilt and being ignored often accompany athletic injury because patients feel isolated and estranged from their team and their sport.<sup>4</sup> Research has demonstrated a positive relationship between injury severity and

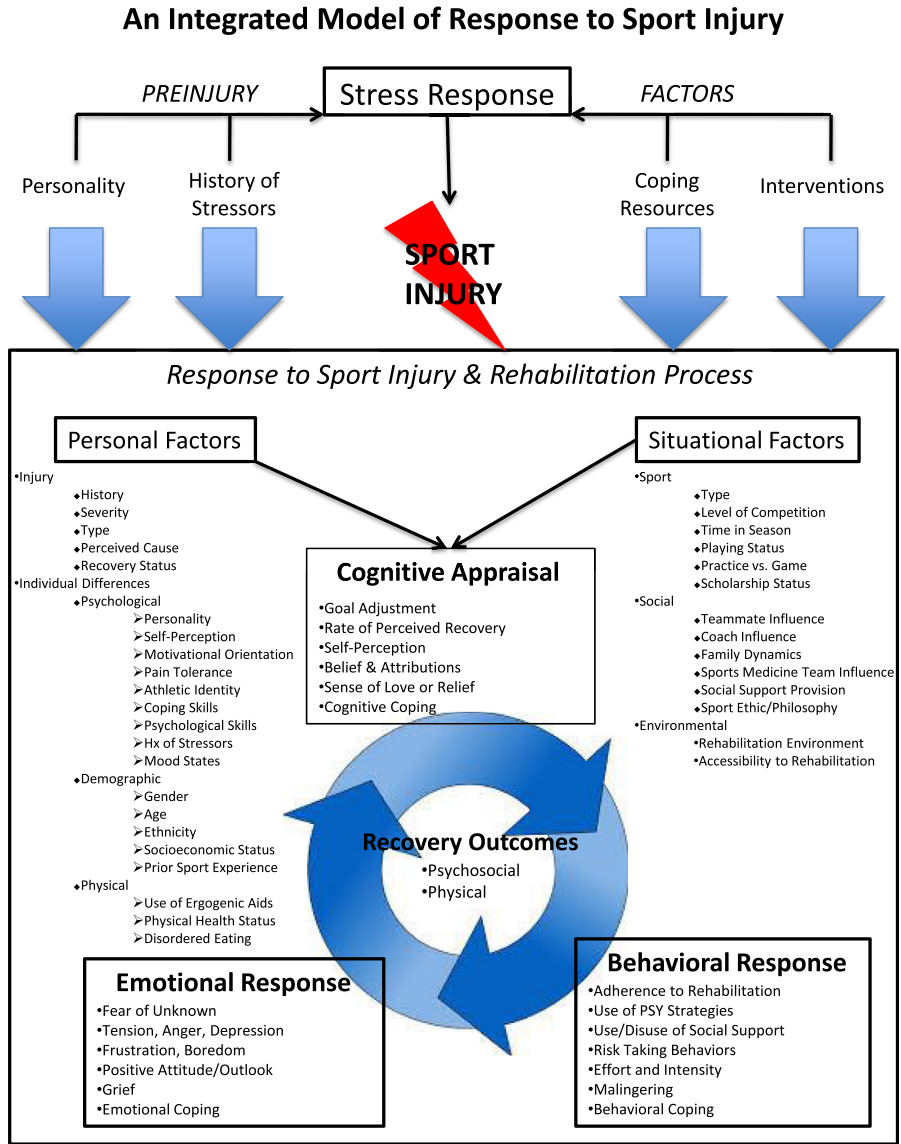
<sup>a</sup> Department of Kinesiology, Michigan State University, 308 West Circle Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA; <sup>b</sup> Department of Health, Promotion, and Human Performance, Weber State University, 302 E Swenson Building, Ogden, UT 84408, USA

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [covassin@msu.edu](mailto:covassin@msu.edu)

negative mood in patients.<sup>5</sup> As a result, several theoretic models have emerged that suggest that cognitive and affective factors may contribute to rehabilitation outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, an understanding of how patients respond to injury and rehabilitation assists clinicians when treating injured patients.<sup>7</sup>

The integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation process<sup>8</sup> is a conceptual model of injury response to an interrelated psychosocial process of cognition, affect, and behavior **Fig. 1.**<sup>9</sup> According to this model, injury



**Fig. 1.** Integrated model of psychological response to the sport injury and rehabilitation process. HX, history; PSY, psychology. (From Wiese-Bjornstal D, Smith A, Shaffer S, et al. An integrated model of response to sport injury: psychological and sociological dynamics. *J Appl Sport Psychol* 1998;10(1):49; with permission.)

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