

# reactivate

PUTTING  
**ACTIVITY**  
BACK INTO  
YOUR LIFE

■ GROWTH ■ RESILIENCE ■ ENERGY ■ ATTITUDE ■ TEAMWORK

Quarterly **PHYSIOSOUTH** Newsletter

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Photo: Homer Saddle and Moir's Mate. Hana Black.

In this newsletter I explain how goals are important in rehabilitation, and also how they can be useful in everyday life. I also question the belief that activity needs to stop because of injury; in fact it is better if it continues. More and more I believe we need to be very active, keeping our body in shape and our mind focused and positive to recover from injury or adversity of any type. At **PHYSIOSOUTH** we are committed to high quality rehabilitation and building capacity physically and mentally. To us they are the same thing.

— Graeme Nuttridge

## GOALS FOR LIFE

The cornerstone of the physiotherapy outcome and driver of our intervention is the **'Functional Goal'**. The word 'functional' is important as it relates to what the patient really wants to do as a result of our mutual efforts. And the patient's contribution is always more important than the therapist's. Once a goal has been sorted it is broken down into objectives (or milestones), then tasks or actions.

Every task and objective should ultimately align with the goal. If this process is followed it really does allow the best opportunity for the 'optimal outcome' and all that is usually required is to do the simple things extremely well. Failure to achieve the goal is an occasional reality. However, our promise 'if we cannot fix

you, then we will send you to someone who will' stands true. Failure to respond to good quality rehab is often a part of the process necessary to access higher levels of investigations and medical specialists. In fact if the process is thorough it isn't failure, just part of a process. We obviously prefer to identify non-responders early rather than late.

### Goals:

- Are functional and important
- Are natural motivators
- Working towards them gives us meaning and purpose
- They move us toward happiness

Continued overleaf ►

**'... goals create a learning response that moves towards increased levels of self determination.'**



- Help us to organize our lives to meet crucial existential, social, personal and psychological needs
- Provide a baseline to measure success

**Research has shown that three things are critical for our subjective well being. They are:**

1. Goals
2. Strong social relationships and
3. Effective cognitive strategies – such as mindfulness (for more on cognitive behavior therapy see *Reactivate*, Spring 2009).

As 2 and 3 are effectively achievable by setting goals it becomes apparent that goal setting is really important to the quality of our lives.

When we set and achieve a goal it creates a learning response that moves towards increased levels of self determination. That allows a feeling of control over our own life and the ability to control the external factors (such as the adversity of injury or job loss). Indeed all realistic goals are achievable if we approach them the right way and are aware of the process (milestones and activities) required. So the more you set and achieve goals the more you feel 'in control of your own life'. So having the life you want is a product of:

1. Choosing the right pursuits or goals
2. Connecting with the right people (for you)

3. Developing upbeat, positive thinking habits or strategies

**Some more points about worthwhile goals:**

#### The Journey

It's the journey that matters: the sense of being engaged in a worthwhile goal or pursuit offers more than actual goal achievement. Many goal-focused high achievers are unhappy, simply because they value the goal not the journey. A sense that we are going somewhere is important, more so than the feeling when we arrive.

#### Goal Orientation

Goals that create are better than those that avoid. For example, I want to be 75 kg verse I want to lose 5 kg.

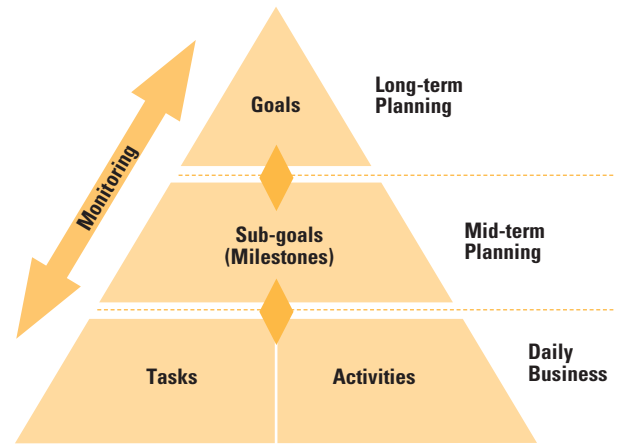
#### Goal Content

Goals that are intrinsic (intimacy, spirituality and generativity) work better than those that are extrinsic (based on power, money or more superficial, external values). Basically it's not just about what we want, but why we want it.

#### Goal Conflict and Anxiety

- Goals can conflict with values, making a toxic psychology.
- Fear of failure may also lead to anxiety, but mild anxiety can be a motivator.

'Strive for enjoyable goals, develop both short and long term goals, seek goals that you value, consider changing



them if need be, and do not focus on ego-gratification or material goals' (Ken Sheldon).

**The most important thing about goals is just having them: it becomes very liberating.**

The more goals you have, the less chance you have of success, so a few well chosen goals generally works well. Consider the key areas of your life, things such as your relationships, yourself, your work as key areas to set goals in, this has the ability to put your life in order, it gives you a sense of control no matter what happens and the ability to bounce back. If every moment you lived as though you where on a very exciting journey, going somewhere you really, really wanted to go it would amount to a life well lived.

## LOWER BACK PAIN AND RUNNING

### Advice for those with lower back pain/injury from running or who stop exercising.

Back pain induced by running is a paradox. Running is one of the first things to go when someone has an episode of lower back pain (LBP), discontinuing what is health-preserving exercise. This is often attributable to unrealistic beliefs about back pain and running. The reality is that most LBP is discogenic (from the disc) and what we know about the disc and what patients tell us is that they are usually worse sitting and bending (flexion) but better when standing and running (neutral toward extension). Only problems in the posterior column (facet joints at the back of the spine, and stress fracture type injuries) load the spine in extension and can contribute to LBP running. So the

reality is that running is not biomechanically bad for the back at all.

If you have a back problem or any other joint problem, and you stop activity, such as running, cycling, swimming or the gym you are depriving yourself of one of the most powerful treatment tools we know: exercise. Stopping exercise is like taking an anti-depressant drug. We now know low mood or depression is a major factor in many chronic diseases, especially low back pain in which it is effectively a 'barrier to recovery'. It's a paradox as the pain may never really go, but you can wait and wait for it to do so before getting active again. All the time your world and mood is in decline.

#### Stay active when you have back pain or injury

1. Try not to stop exercising. Reduce the amount by all means or change the exercise, but do not stop – that can be catastrophic.

2. The general rule of thumb is that it can hurt a little during exercise but ideally should not be worse after. The 'morning test' is a good one: if you are

the same or better in the morning after exercise you have not done yourself any harm, so continue.

3. Try to find activity that is injury friendly (like back pain and running). For example; if you have a lower limb injury you may actually need to stop running for a while but may be fine cycling.

4. When increasing activity after injury you can generally incrementally increase your activity levels by 10% per session or time period. Increasing too much too soon can be too tough and provoke symptoms or cause re-aggravation.

Remember that pain is not disability, pain can be present to some degree and you can still be very active, and I firmly believe there is always a series of activities or exercises you can do that are injury friendly and this will always help recovery.

**'If you have a back problem ... and you stop activity ... you are depriving yourself of one of the most powerful treatment tools we know: exercise.'**

