



## Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

### The 10% Rule

**Q:** *Since high school, I have stayed fit playing a variety of team sports. I particularly enjoy soccer and basketball. Eight months ago I tore a ligament in my right knee and needed surgery. I am recovering well and was told to avoid twisting sports for at least a year. In an effort to stay fit, I joined a swimming club. While I am not the strongest swimmer, I am a hard worker and in a short time I was able to significantly increase my swimming distances. Recently, I developed shoulder pain and my physiotherapist strongly recommended I reduce my training. Since reducing my swimming distances my shoulders feel much better. Could you provide some guidance on how to safely progress my future training? Claude*

**A:** Dear Claude: It's great to hear that you have found a way to stay fit while you recover from your knee injury. One of the most common mistakes people make when they first take up a new fitness activity is to work too hard. They often begin training too intensely, doing longer workouts than they can handle and/or doing too many workouts in a week. This can often result in overload to parts of the body and injuries and frustration can follow.

To reduce the risk of this happening, fitness experts generally advise active people to follow the "10% Rule". This evidence based guideline states you should not increase your training activity more than ten percent per week. This applies to every aspect of your training – the distances covered, the weight lifted, the intensity and type of effort put forth, and the time spent training. In your case, if you currently swim for a 30 minute workout, you should limit next week's swims to no more than 33minutes in length no matter how good you are feeling. Following this formula it should take you a minimum of 7 weeks to safely work up to swimming 60 minutes per workout. This rule is not an absolute as some people find they can only safely progress their training by less than 10% per week.

The bottom line is that the body needs time to adapt to the stress of exercise whether you are a novice or an Olympic medalist. Failing to respect this need to adapt will overload tissues and greatly increase your risk of injury. I hope your knee heals well and that you apply the 10% rule to all of your future fitness training.

#### Dr. Darrell Menard MD Dip Sport Med

Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

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