



THE BONE DOCTOR

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

“DEPENDING ON THE AMOUNT YOU RIDE, YOU MAY EXPERIENCE EXERCISE WITHDRAWAL, SIMILAR TO THE WITHDRAWAL FROM OTHER DRUGS.”

When I originally approached Shayne and Frans of *Full Sus* with the idea to share my experience treating cycling and sports related injuries, I mercifully had no personal experience of suffering from a cycling injury. All that has changed. About a week after handing in last month's article on clavicle fractures, I fracture my own clavicle!

At this point, I am too nervous to tempt fate and write about any of the other cycling-specific injuries, just in case Mr Murphy makes another appearance.

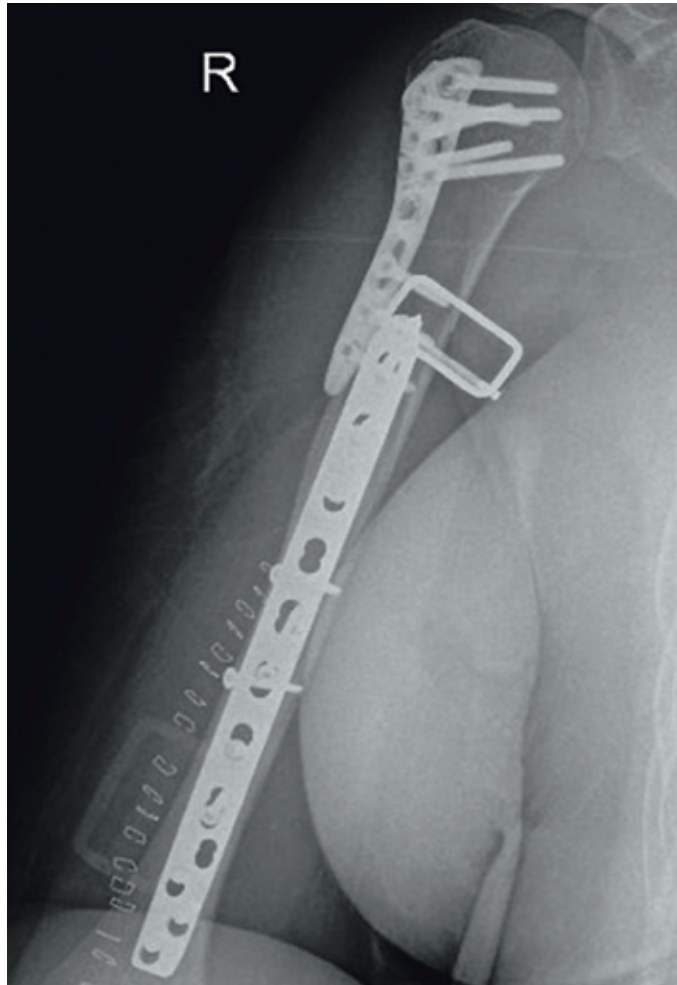
Instead, in keeping with the theme of this month's issue and tackling the issue of injury recovery and how to optimise it, I will also share some personal experience of injury prevention.

Part of the appeal of mountain biking is the adrenalin element; the thrill of successfully tackling a trail and overcoming the risks. To an outsider, the danger of mountain biking appears to be rocks, roots, drop-offs and other obstacles, but more than half the injuries I see do not occur in this seemingly treacherous environment. Rather they happen when your attention span drops, or you relax as you hit a benign section of the track. The car park or gravel road sections claim more injuries than they should. So please stay alert out there, stay hydrated and fed, and don't fall prey to silly mistakes. It goes without saying that skills coaching, whether formal, or tips from more experienced riders, will go a long way to keeping the rubber on the dirt.

Once injured, here are some route markers to speed you back to health:

ASSESSMENT

Firstly get a diagnosis. You need an accurate assessment



of the problem. Don't be passive – enquire as to what is happening and what to expect. Knowledge is the key to understanding what the implications of your injury are. You need to establish what is damaged, and as much information about that body part's function as you can process, so that you understand all the elements of your recovery.

Also enquire as to the severity of your injury. Most injuries fall somewhere on a spectrum from minor to FUBAR. Get a perspective on where your injury is to guide your expectations.

TAKE IT “ON-BOARD”

Along with the above information, press your doctor, physio or surgeon for a time frame. From our point of view, this is often a difficult question to answer as so many factors play a role in healing. It is often best to ask for a “best case versus worst case” outlook so that you have a rough idea of your time-frame.

With the understanding you have gained, take stock of your situation. Reassess your cycling, family, work and social goals. Do not try and stick to the plans you had before you became injured. Things will change and unless you expect

Our regular bone-guru, **Dr Mike Mulder**, has unfortunately now had some first-hand experience with serious cycling injuries. Read about his recent misfortunes.



and adjust, you will be your own worst enemy during your recovery.

TAKE IT EASY

Take it from me, injuries hurt. A lot. Pain is not just inconvenient and annoying, it prolongs and interferes with your recovery. So do as you are told and take your painkillers. They allow you to do what is necessary to get well. If they don't agree with you, enquire as to what else you can take; many combinations are available. You don't earn bravery medals for coming off your painkillers early.

And rest – for goodness sake. It is the basic tenet of recovery. Your body needs to channel all available resources to the injured area. Cycling and excess activity directs energy away from where you need it. If the injury warrants it, take time out. You will be glad you did and be better off for it.

Depending on the amount you ride, you may experience exercise withdrawal, similar to the withdrawal from other drugs, alcohol or caffeine. This can result in mood changes, irritability and general grumpiness. Warn your family to be patient with you.

BACK ON THE BIKE

Although it seems a long way off in the early days after an injury, the time will come to get back out there. Take it slow. Understand that you will have lost both fitness and, more importantly, confidence. Both are elements which you need to stay safe. Don't think you will pick up where you left off. Start on the road, revisit your bike setup to accommodate your injured area and take the chicken run until you feel you are getting your nerve back. Set yourself realistic and achievable goals to guide you back where you want to be.

With my newly acquired insights into injuries, I can attest to the massive frustrations they bring. Be patient with yourself and allow your body the chance to get well soon. **fs**



LEFT: After surgery, you can expect your arm to look bionic. TOP RIGHT: If you are injured, apply ice to the affected area. ABOVE MIDDLE: A rather large scar will forever remind you about what you've survived while riding. ABOVE RIGHT: A stationary training bike is your only safe option when you've been seriously injured.

Dr Mike Mulder is an orthopaedic surgeon specialising in the treatment of shoulder, elbow and hand disorders and injuries. He is based at Constantiaberg Mediclinic, and is a member of The Cape Shoulder and Elbow Unit. He has a wealth of experience in fixing injured cyclists and is an avid mountain biker. He rides as often as his wife and family let him.

