

Acute and Chronic Inflammation – What is the Difference and Why?

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Acute Inflammation is what happens when you first get hurt. There is a rapid response of information blazing its way up from the injured area up to the brain. There is almost simultaneously a local inflammation of the “pro-inflammatory mediators,” which creates increased circulation with white blood cells to defend the body from a risk of infection; this is seen as swelling. This swelling also braces the part so that it does not move.

This process then goes from a ‘bracing’ to a ‘remodeling’ phase where the tissue is healing and now it needs to move to get back to normal.

- Movement helps to flush out any extra of the chemical soup and at the same time teaches the body and brain that movement is a good thing and there is no need to protect it.
- The normal tissue healing time is 4–6 weeks to full function.
- Do you remember your last paper cut? It hurt. It healed. It is a faded memory. The rest of your body can do that, too. Inflammation is a glorious and complex event!

Chronic Inflammation is when that initial swelling doesn’t go away as it should. Chronic inflammation, like chronic pain, is more complex.

- When the swelling persists, it makes changes in the nerves and other tissues in the swollen area that change how the fluid is handled, like puddles in the yard when it rains – some parts don’t drain well and get ‘flooded’.
- Chronic inflammation needs to be checked out by your physician to rule out immune changes and to discuss possible anti-inflammatory medication, wrapping, and certainly moving the part to help with drainage.

The physical therapists at **WPTI** will create an exercise program to help you deal with acute and chronic injuries. Make us a part of the treatment plan!