



## **Racing and Riding with Pain**

**BY COACH MARC SPATARO**

Unfortunately injuries and pain are common occurrences within the sport of ATV racing and riding. Dealing with these issues can be challenging especially when deciding whether you should keep on racing or let your body heal and rest. Many of the professional riders have no choice but to get back out there and race in order to maintain or improve their current point standings. But there comes a time when you have to consider whether or not you are doing further damage that may affect you for the rest of your life.

In order to make the right decision I suggest that you use a medical professional to diagnose what type of injury and pain you are dealing with. Make sure you thoroughly understand your injury by asking as many questions as possible. Write down questions that come to mind before entering the doctor's office, sometimes hearing all of that medical jargon can be overwhelming and it is easy to forget important questions. Do not be afraid to get a second opinion, especially if you feel as if your questions were answered vaguely and you still do not fully understand the injury or its outcome. No physician will ever tell you it is ok to race with an injury but at least you can understand the severity of that particular injury and decide whether you are willing to take the risk of worsening the condition.

Some injuries may require physical therapy, make sure you chose a physical therapist that is familiar with our sport and has worked with athletes before. Using a professional who understands the physical demands our bodies go through while racing will ensure the therapy given will prepare your body for future races. I am fortunate to have a physical therapist, Dr. Morgan Johnson, on staff at my facility and he has also competed in several mountain bikes races and is an avid motorcyclist. His knowledge and understanding of ATV racing has helped many of the Moto Pro Training Racers over come injuries and continue to compete with out missing any races. Together Morgan and I assess a rider's condition and develop a pro-active formula that will speed up the recovery process and strengthen the injured area.

Just recently MPT 's Bill Balance had a severe rib cage injury, one that would have kept most racers out of the game, ending their racing season. Utilizing techniques to help reduce inflammation, relax musculature, increase blood flow, reduce pain, and provide support to the affected area, Bill was not only capable of racing but securing his 9<sup>th</sup> GNCC Championship. To Bill's credit it also takes a great deal of mental strength to overcome an injury like this one, but this type of mental strength is exactly why he has continued to dominate cross country racing for so many years.

If you are suffering from a new injury or a reoccurring one here are several suggestions to help with the recovery process. As stated previously see a medical professional and get a grasp on the problem. If possible rest and recover the injured area until conditions subside. Be pro active to help speed up the recovery. Reduce inflammation by using ice/heat packs. Soak sore and painful muscles in Epsom salt baths. Visit a massage therapist who is familiar with athletes and injuries. Massage will help to eliminate muscle tension, increase blood flow, and reduce inflammation. Use prescribed medications or over the counter pain relievers to help control pain aiding in relaxation for recovery. Provide your body with good quality nutrients in order to supply the building blocks necessary for rebuilding and repairing the injured area. High quality proteins and water are the two most important nutrients to promote healing within the body. Visualize healing within your body. Your brain is the strongest organ in the body, use it to assist with self-healing, a technique that has been practiced for 1000s of years. My Mom has survived three bouts with cancer, each time she was given a certain time frame for life, through her beliefs in self healing and traditional medical practices she is alive and well today.

After you have felt some relief seek out a qualified fitness professional to develop a program to strengthen and develop your body. A well-conditioned body will recover from injuries much quicker than an out of shape one. This year I had one of the largest hurdles to overcome in my life. I had been dealing with severe lower back pain that eventually caused me to lose feeling in my left leg all the way down to my toes. I took the time to see three different physicians, all of them familiar with athletes and the importance of being physically active. My diagnosis was that I had a large bone growth off of my L5 vertebrae that was putting pressure on my nerves and causing severe swelling and inflammation. The only choice I had was surgery! This was very scary for me for many reasons, first and foremost this was my spine and the second is that my whole life revolves around being physically active. So with great hesitation I choose the doctor I felt most comfortable with and under went the knife. I was told I would be looking at a 12-week recovery period, but because I was already in great shape my recovery was much quicker. I had my surgery on May 7, 2008 and by the time summer break was over I raced my first post surgery race at Snowshoe. While I feel that I am still not 100% physically, I am very happy just to be out there on my quad challenging myself both mentally and physically.

Ultimately do your best to stay injury free, ride smart, wear protective gear, and try and to not take any extreme risks on your ATV. As always if there is any way I can help contact me at [www.motoprotraining.com](http://www.motoprotraining.com)! MS

