

One of the most important health lessons that I try to teach my patients is that when damaged, the body always attempts to heal. If successful, then the symptom caused by the damage goes away and does not recur. If a symptom persists beyond a reasonable time frame such as six to eight weeks, or if the symptom goes away and recurs, then the body either did not heal or it healed imperfectly.

With certain conditions, this is normally what happens. A cut, for instance, will typically heal without any outside intervention. Most cuts do not need stitches, antibiotics or disinfectants. Within a few days they heal to the point that they don't hurt unless something presses against or rubs the wound. After a week or so, they heal to the point that they don't hurt even with pressure. Eventually new skin completely replaces the damaged skin.

An injury will persist or recur in two circumstances. First, if the cause of the problem is still present: second, if it doesn't heal properly. For example: A splinter differs from a cut in that after a cut, the cause is gone. A wound caused by a splinter is different. If it remains in the wound not only will it not heal, it usually will get worse.

An injury that heals imperfectly will often cause ongoing problems. As I discussed in my last column, this is often due to the development of scar tissue that either builds to excess or doesn't dissolve away as new normal tissue is created. Scar tissue isn't very elastic so if it grows in places that require motion, it can lead to abnormal motion

In many back and neck injuries, there is an initial cause and then a secondary cause. The initial cause is often some activity or event that over stresses the connecting tissue that holds the spinal bones together. The secondary cause is the misalignment or abnormal joint motion that results from the initial cause. This secondary cause can, over time, lead to more tissue damage.

A typical example is a person who suffers an initial injury, has pain for a week or two and then feels better, thinking that they have recovered. Later, sometimes months later, they begin to have pain again in the same area. The scar tissue and/or misalignment that resulted from the initial injury causes ongoing malfunction that leads to more damage. Often the pain is controlled with medication, but the underlying problem is not corrected, so the problem continues and eventually gets worse.

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