



Muscle Strains in the Low Back

Muscle strain overview

A muscle strain can be a very painful experience that occurs when a muscle is stretched too far, or using a muscle in the “wrong way”. It may cause you to experience pain, spasm or tightness, swelling, and sometimes even some bruising, weakness, and intermittent tingling sensation.

A muscle strain can happen during an accident, holding your body in a non-neutral position, exercise, or movement where you suddenly exert yourself much harder than normal (e.g., trying to catch something that is falling). You may not know how it happened.

Treatment

Most muscle strains will get better on their own and do not require tests or medication. Some strains may take days or weeks to fully heal. Here are some at-home tips to help ease pain and heal faster:

Without significantly reducing your activity, take it easy on that muscle for a few days. Allow for adjustments in how you move if moving is painful and extra rest time when needed. Pay close attention to your posture and the position you are in while performing daily tasks. After your pain gets better, you can talk with your health care provider on recommendations for stretches and exercises.

Ice the area for 15 minutes every 1 to 2 hours, at least 6 hours after the injury and up to 2 days after.

If you feel that medication is needed to ease the pain, contact your healthcare provider.

Prevention

A good way to prevent muscle strains is to stretch and warm up before exercising. Good flexibility helps the muscle to move more effectively.

Certain activities at home or at work are at a higher risk of muscle strains by repeating motions or heavy lifting. Using correct form (body mechanics) and good posture can prevent future strains. If you are not sure how, talk to your healthcare provider.

Managing your stress and getting adequate rest is key to allowing your body to recover after exercise and strenuous activity. If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed, contact your primary care provider as soon as possible.

Your primary source of information about managing your back pain should be your health care provider. The information shared here does not replace their advice and guidance. Please consult your low back pain care provider before changing your normal activity or exercise routine, and contact your primary care provider if you are experiencing any signs of mental distress such as feelings of being overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed.

