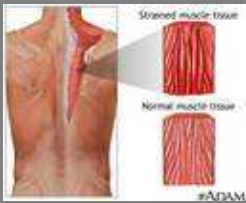




E-Mail Newsletter

<<June 2008>>

**Volume 1,
Number 1**



Treatment of Acute Injuries

A strain to a muscle or tendon is probably the most common type of acute injury. This occurs when the tissue fibres become torn or damaged and causes bleeding and swelling, due to overloading or stretching. As well as pain and dysfunction, heat and redness may be noticed.

Many books explain how to treat acute injuries, but the general public never seems to read them until it is too late. All too often people try to do what they think is best, based on their general knowledge. And with the best intentions they usually get it about half right and three-quarters wrong. For the accurate treatment of acute injuries follow the RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) procedure for the first 24-48 hours (depending on the severity) after the injury.

Rest for injured area is absolutely vital in early stage. If fibres have been torn apart, any movement will continue to open and aggravate the tear and cause much more bleeding. Immediate rest from any movement or load-bearing enables the fibres to knit together quickly before any more damage is done. It is far better to over-react with too much rest in early stage then to try and ignore the symptoms. The temptation to try and use the injured part, to see if it still hurts, must be avoided during this initial period. No real fitness will be lost in just two days, but if the trauma is aggravated it could take much longer in the end to get back to normal activity.



Ice should be applied as soon as possible, as this slows down blood circulation and so reduces the amount of bleeding and swelling in the tissues. If ice is not available, anything cold will do (bag of frozen peas is excellent) although 'cold sprays' are not effective enough. Ice should not be placed directly on the skin as this can cause it to burn. The ice should be wrapped in a cloth. Ice should only be applied locally to the injury site and, if dealing with a limb injury, it should not go all the way round it as this will restrict blood flow to the more distal parts. One error often made is the timing of the treatment. How long is ice applied for depends mainly on the area involved- a small area like the wrist will chill quicker (about 5 min) than a large area like the thigh (up to 20 min). To help judge the right amount of time, observe the colour of the skin, ideally it should look pale, if it looks red, it means it was too long. Ice treatment can be repeated often providing enough time is given to allow the skin temperature to return to normal before repeating it. Reducing swelling is not the only reason for icing acute injury. Ice has an analgesic effect, by chilling and numbing the pain receptors. By reducing the pain sensation it also reduces the protective spasm around the injury, and the area becomes more relaxed which allows the healing process to begin.

Compression should be applied to the injury site immediately. It compresses the blood vessels, so preventing blood from escaping through the open ends of the torn fibres. Compression should be applied by using a firm pad over the injury site, with a strapping around it to hold it in place. Do not apply compression around a whole limb, as this will starve other areas of blood.

Elevation of the injured area should be practiced as much as possible. A leg or arm should be comfortably supported so that is raised higher than the torso. This allows gravity to assist the removal of swelling from the area and so aids recovery.

Correct and immediate acute treatment as described here can achieve fantastic results and can remove the symptoms of the injury almost completely.

However, if the area remains inflamed after 48 hours, despite good RICE procedure, this suggest that it could be more than a minor soft tissue injury and must be medically assessed.

Massage should not be applied directly to an acute injury because it can reopen the tears in the fibres. However, general massage techniques away from the injury, are very beneficial and can be given at the same time as the RICE procedure.

Post-acute Treatment

Treatment in post-acute stage is difficult to explain as it depends on nature and location of injury. Generally when the signs of inflammation have gone the MICE (Mobilization, Ice, Compression, Elevation) procedure should be followed. Sports massage therapist can advise you about post-acute treatment as well as help you with mobilization, can give you massage or teach you self-massage techniques. Massage in post-acute phase will:

- Reduce swelling
- Stimulate circulation (promote healing)
- Prevent excessive scar tissue forming
- Prevent or break down adhesions.

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