

# IS MY PAIN JUST MUSCLE SORENESS OR AN INJURY?



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For a lot of us, pain in the body may come and go, like a headache. You may have a pain for an hour or maybe a day. But often, it simply goes away and you forget about it. There are many factors and mechanisms that cause pain in the body and sometimes you may feel it's not bad enough to actually go and see someone about it. The best tip I can give is that you should be doing something about your pain BEFORE it becomes **severe** or **long lasting**. But how do you know when, exactly?

To help you with this question I have put together some info about pain, injury, and when to seek professional advice and treatment.

## DELAYED ONSET MUSCLE SORENESS

After training you can develop delayed onset muscle soreness, known as 'D.O.M.S'. This is pain and stiffness felt in the muscle for 24-72 hours, days after strenuous or unaccustomed exercise. It is caused by damage to the muscle during the eccentric (lengthening) part of the contraction and the soreness is when the muscle adapts afterwards. It is a common and a normal muscle response if you have pushed yourself hard, worked muscles in the outer limits of their flexibility, lifted heavier weights than you usually do or you have not exercised in a while.

For example, if you have done a lot of heavy squats, and the next day your thigh and buttocks are sore, this is D.O.M.S. The pain is over a large area throughout the muscles and usually both sides. The best thing to do is rest, gentle stretching and avoid training the sore body parts at that intensity for 48-72 hours.

Doing muscle building and strength training programs means you will most likely get D.O.M.S. Many people refer to this as a 'good pain', but the biggest misconception is that people feel like they have to get D.O.M.S or they are not working out hard enough. You need to make sure you are on the correct graded training program for your level of fitness, strength and conditioning.

## SEVERE D.O.M.S.

If you are getting **severe** D.O.M.S, meaning you have muscle pain that prevents you from walking properly or you struggle to get off the toilet, you have pushed it too far. Having severe D.O.M.S. will make you change your patterns of movement to avoid the pain in the muscles, which will make you compensate during exercise with other muscle groups and overload biomechanically, causing injury. Again the treatment for severe D.O.M.S is simply rest, then gentle stretching but also seeing a personal trainer for correction of your workout program, level and intensity.

## DO I HAVE SEVERE D.O.M.S OR SUFFERED A MUSCLE INJURY?

Determining whether it's just severe D.O.M.S. or whether you have actually suffered an injury is all down to the nature of the pain, the surface area and when it happens. With a muscle injury the pain is localised to one small area in the muscle, is more severe and has an ache with it. There is sharp pain on flexing the muscle and there is a loss of power. With injury the pain comes on either during or immediately after training (not the next day or so like D.O.M.S.). The pain can last for many days and sometimes weeks and longer. If you have pain like this you most likely have suffered a muscle 'tear'.

As soon as you feel this type of pain you need to get the injury assessed to see the extent of the damage and what to do about it (and not wait hoping it goes away). Seeing a Physio for rehab will increase your chances of returning to exercise more quickly by helping your recovery, getting you strengthening early and preventing the breakdown in your training regime. They will also work out why you are getting injured in the first place and help prevent it happening again.

### MY PAIN COMES AND GOES, IS IT AN INJURY?

If you get pain that comes on during exercise but eases afterwards and then returns when you exercise again, you need to take notice. This type of pain is usually from inflammation or irritation of tendons and joints, and sometimes other serious structures (like discs in your back). The pain can occur with certain movements like; in your shoulder when raising your arm, on the outside of your knee-cap during a run, or in your lower back after bending. As soon as you stop the exercise or movement, the pain subsides, but it always comes back. If the pain during exercise increases, doesn't ease after and is worse at night, then your problem is getting worse. Inflammation in a tendon is called *tendonitis* and if not seen early, can develop into a 'tendinopathy', where the tendon weakens significantly preventing it from improving. Rest relieves the pain only temporarily and over time actually makes the injury worse because you are getting weaker. It is essential that you address the pain before it gets to this stage and becomes a chronic recurring condition. Inflammatory pain is usually tackled with anti-inflammatory medication, but sometimes that's it.

The reason for the inflammation occurring when you exercise also needs to be worked out and treated.

### I HAVE DEFINITELY SUFFERED A TRAINING INJURY, WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

Most people know when they have suffered a significant training or sports injury. It's immediate and it hurts a lot. If your injury pain is severe, you cannot move an arm or leg, you have immediately a large amount of swelling, you should seek professional advice straight away as you may also need medications and X-rays or scans. Unless you're a professional athlete, the Physio or Doctor is not there by your side when you need them the most! Many people roll their ankle, have it swell up and think it's just a sprain, only to find out it's a fracture after hobbling around on it for 4 days. For acute sprains and strains, the best treatment is still the RICE principle (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) for the first 24-48 hours. The ice part should be done for around 30 minutes every 2-3 hours and the best compression is a double layer tubular bandage.

So take notice of any pain during and after exercise, when and where it is in the body. Make sure you are on the correct training program and seek professional advice as needed to see if you have an injury and what to do about it.

For more advice on this topic you can email me at [timkeeley@physiofitness.com.au](mailto:timkeeley@physiofitness.com.au)

For more articles go to: [physiofitness.com.au/articles.htm](http://physiofitness.com.au/articles.htm)



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Tim has over 13 years experience in Physiotherapy and the Fitness Industry. He is also an exercise rehabilitation expert, clinical educator and regular FILEX convention presenter. As well as the Principal Physiotherapist at his Bondi Junction clinic inside Fitness First Platinum, Tim is also the Director of Physio Fitness Australia operating four clinics across Sydney.

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