

# MUSCLE ACHES AND STIFFNESS

## **FACTS:**

- ◆ Muscle aches and pains are common and can involve more than one muscle. Muscle pain can also involve ligaments, tendons, and fascia (soft tissues that connect muscles, bones & organs).
- ◆ Muscle pain is most frequently related to tension or stress (i.e. financial worries), injury or trauma including sprains and strains & overuse or muscle injury from exercise, poor lifting technique or physically-demanding work. Pain tends to involve specific muscles and starts during or just after the activity. Injury and pain could be a first time event or a recurrence from a past injury.
- ◆ **Ones ability to handle pain varies greatly among individuals and it's highly important to diagnosis injury correctly.**
- ◆ Lower back pain is one of the #1 reasons for visits to a primary care or urgent care physician.
- ◆ Muscle pain can also be a sign of conditions affecting ones whole body, like some inflections (or the flu), disorders that effect connective tissues (i.e. lupus) or the challenging disease fibromyalgia.
- ◆ Certain drugs including ACE inhibitors for lowering blood pressure and statins for lowering cholesterol (heavy legs feeling) can cause muscle pain or cramps along with electrolyte imbalances (too little potassium or calcium), chemical poisoning or skin disorders.

## **TREATMENT:**

### **HOT & COLD TREATMENT:**

Cold treatment is used immediately to relief pain by numbing the area, reducing swelling & relaxing the muscles. Ice packs (or a bag of frozen vegetables) should be applied for up to 20 minutes at a time, 3 to 4 times daily for three (3) days. Place a cloth between the skin and ice pack to avoid frostbite.

**After 48 hours**, you can try heat to help relief pain. Heat increases blood flow through the muscles & aids healing. Heat is not used immediately to help pain since added blood flow can increase the appearance of bruising. Apply heat treatment (heating pad; wet towel microwaved; whirlpool bath) no more than four (4) times daily for 20 minutes at a time. Use caution (especially when skin is already numb) so that skin burns are avoided.

### **BATH SOAK:**

Add a cup of Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) to a warm water bath. Relax & soak. Add two (2) cups of apple cider vinegar to help with blood circulation. Rest after soak for as long as possible.

### **DRUG THERAPY:**

Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (e.g. aspirin, ibuprofen or naproxen) are helpful with mild to moderate pain. Non-opiate pain medications (e.g. tramadol) and opiate-based medications like hydrocodone and oxycodone are often used for moderate to severe pain. Muscle relaxants like

Flexeril (cyclobenzoprine), carisoprodol (Soma) or methocarbamol are used to help with spasms and stiffness.

## **TOPICAL AND ALTERNATIVE TREATMENTS:**

Different formulations of creams, ointments, lotions, gels, liniments & oils are used to help relief muscle aches and pains. The common ingredients within formulations include:

- ◆ **Camphor Oil:** Old, natural medication that is absorbed easily into the skin and produces a cooling, soothing effect
- ◆ **Menthol:** Old, natural medication that instantaneously brings cool, soothing pain relief to hurting muscle tissue (direct analgesic & widens blood vessels to increase blood flow)
- ◆ **Capsaicin Cream:** Capsaicin is the active ingredient in chili peppers. It provides temporary relief of muscle and joint pain and can also help to relieve itching.
- ◆ **Arnica Montana:** Used medicinally to treat strains, sprains and bruises for centuries. It is a plant-based product that contains derivatives of thymol (widens blood vessels to increase blood flow). Arnica preparations are often used by professional athletes.
- ◆ **Homeopathic:** Homeopathy is an old practice of medicine (especially Europe & India) based on the same principle as immunizations: give someone a small dose of what would make them sick to cure their sickness. Some of the natural homeopathic remedies used to help alleviate pain include: Aesculus; Arnica Montana; Colocythis; Gnaphalium; Lycopodium; Rhus Toxicodendron)
- ◆ **DMSO Gel (dimethylsulfoxide):** Old and controversial clear liquid anti-inflammatory medication used for both acute and chronic pain (relief may last for six hours or more). Used topically under the supervision of a doctor (prescription) to decrease pain and speed the healing of wounds, burns and muscle and skeletal injuries. Also, used topically, taken orally or given intravenously for many other medical conditions
- ◆ **Aromatherapy:** Many types of plant-based essential oils (Most common: Lavender oil; Geranium oil; Lemon Grass oil; Birch oil; Marjoram oil) have been used throughout the world to help relax tight muscles and to treat strains, sprains and joint pain. Peppermint, Pine Oil and Ginger help to improve circulation
- ◆ **Supplements:** Glucosamine, Devil's Claw, Turmeric and Boswellia are nutritional supplements often taken to help with the maintenance of sore joints and muscles. Research has shown that proteolytic or anti-inflammatory enzymes taken daily can be a safe and effective way to fight inflammation, reduce pain, dissolve scar tissue and cleanse and thin the blood (Most common: bromelain; papain, protease products)
- ◆ **Professional Services:** Injections; Chiropractic Therapy; Acupuncture; Physical Therapy; Massage Therapy

## **HELPFUL TIPS:**

When using creams or related topical applications, apply just enough to cover affected area. Gently massage the medicine into the skin until it disappears. Allow at **least** 30 minutes for the medicine to absorb before washing.

Don't underestimate the importance of correct footwear. Flat shoes with good support are best.

Make sure that gravity is your friend. If one leg is shorter than the other (and not corrected by inserts) or if arch support is needed, the body can keep shift weight and cause problems especially a re-activation of an old injury.

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