

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Muscle strains

This leaflet intends to educate you on the immediate management of your muscle strain. It also contains advice regarding pain management and lifestyle choices.

What is a muscle strain?

A muscle strain is an injury to the muscle belly, often known as a 'pulled muscle'. It can happen in any muscle when it's overstretched or torn. This usually occurs because of fatigue, overuse, or explosive movements such as kicking a ball. They are most common in the calf, hamstring and lower back.

There are 3 grades of strain, depending on the severity of the injury.

Symptoms you may experience:

- Pain in muscle belly, particularly when using the muscle.
- Tenderness along the muscle.
- Swelling, bruising and redness depending on the grade of the injury.
- Weakness of the muscles or inability to use it at all.

Management

Muscle strains are initially managed with 6 steps. This can be remembered with the word **POLICE**:

- **P**rotect the injury with relative rest (keep moving but rest often).
- **O**ptimal Loading by gradually increasing the weight through the affected limb early on. Evidence suggests this aids quicker recovery. If you are struggling with your walking or weight bearing, you may be provided with crutches to help.
- **I**ce, **C**ompression and **E**levation of the leg to aid with reducing the swelling is also important.

It's also important to start some gentle exercises. If required, your physiotherapist can issue a graded exercise programme.

As the pain starts to settle down you should be able to gradually return to normal activity as comfort allows.

Try to walk as normally as possible; early weight bearing can aid quicker recovery.

Pain management

If you are able to take simple pain relief this may help initially, however, if you are not sure whether you can take them, please speak to either a pharmacist or your GP.

Keeping mobile and exercising will help to increase your confidence and reduce the pain and swelling around the site of injury.

Factors affecting healing

Healing usually takes six to eight weeks. However, experiencing discomfort and swelling for longer than this is normal for this type of injury.

Staying on top of the following factors can help move the healing process along and give your ankle the best chance of a quick recovery:

Stress relief - utilise techniques such as mindfulness, meditation and deep breathing cycles. Speak to your health care professional for more information.

Sleep hygiene - consistently getting 6-9 hours is recommended by the NHS. Only use your bedroom for sleep, e.g. not for TV.

Nutrition - make sure you have a balanced diet. Vitamin D has been correlated with reduction in joint pain.

Smoking – this has been linked with musculoskeletal pain and delayed healing. For more advice see smoking cessation or ask your therapist for more information.

Alcohol – avoid alcohol in the early stages of healing (first three days). Evidence has shown this can slow down recovery and increase the chances of re-injury.

Frequently asked questions

Will a muscle strain injury heal itself and how long will it take?

The majority of muscle strain injuries will heal by themselves within two to six weeks. Severe sprains and strains can take months to get back to normal. Occasionally, when there is a complete rupture of the muscle or tendon, further intervention is required.

When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal is to help you return to your sport or hobbies as soon as is safely possible. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. We would advise for you to avoid strenuous exercise such as running for up to eight weeks, as there's a risk of further damage.

Return to sport or activity will be determined by how soon your knee recovers, not by days and weeks. This will be when you can:

- Fully bend and straighten the surrounding joints without pain.
- Your injured limb has regained strength compared to the uninjured limb.
- Your knee is not giving way.

For higher level sports such as football, rugby, skiing:

- You are able to jog without a limp.
- You are able to change direction without pain.
- You are able to jump and hop on the injured leg without pain or giving way.

Your physiotherapist can advise around return to specific sports and progress your exercises to target more sport specific activities. Normally, the twisting or change of direction element is the area that takes the longest to rehabilitate.

You may require one-to-one physiotherapy if you are still struggling with your ankle after a few weeks of following this advice. If so, please contact us – details below.

Clinic 10, Physiotherapy Department
Telephone: 01623 672384

King's Mill Hospital
Mansfield Road
Sutton in Ashfield
Nottinghamshire
NG17 4JL

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 622515

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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