

Taking care of yourself when little things go wrong

For muscular discomfort

1. Heat therapy

Heating helps relieve many forms of muscular discomfort. It works by relaxing the muscle. Just as importantly though, it serves to increase the effectiveness of stretching and massage.

No matter what you use to apply the heat, the rule is to heat for 10 –15 minutes then proceed with any massage or stretches that have been recommended.

A wheat bag is a good idea for neck and shoulders because you can heat while going about your normal activities. Take care not to overheat the bag as this can be a fire hazard.

Heat the wheat bag according to manufacturer's instructions but put a small amount of water in a bowl in the microwave along with the bag. This will produce a moist heat which is more effective than dry heat. Make sure that the wheat bag is completely dry before storing it away. If you don't have a wheat bag then a hot water bottle or a heat pack will achieve the same result in a less convenient way.

Remember if you get worse with heat therapy (and here you're looking at immediate results as well as 2 hours down the track) then you need to control the inflammation. Don't repeat the heat therapy.

2. Massaging Muscles with the Massage Ball

- Heat the area first if possible. You'll still get good results if you don't.
- Place the ball on the belly of the muscle between you and the wall.
- Move your legs away from the wall so that you can lean on the ball
- Massage along or across the muscle for **3 to 5 minutes only**. You'll bruise if you get carried away - be warned!

3. Releasing Trigger Points with the Massage Ball

Trigger points are tender nodules in a tight muscle. When pressed they refer pain, numbness or tingling to a completely different area. Active trigger points in the muscles over the shoulder blade for example, often refer pain to the arm or front of the shoulder.

You can use the massage ball to release a trigger point. Place it on the trigger point (ouch!), lean on a wall and press until the referred pain just begins. **Hold for 3 minutes then stretch the muscle by lengthening it.** During the 3 minutes, the referred pain should start to diminish and may even disappear.

4. Stretching

Here are some rules and remember that heating the area first will enhance the stretch effect.

- Stretch daily or better still, twice or more a day.
- Take your time and stretch slowly, relaxing as you stretch, concentrating on smooth regular breathing.
- Repeat each exercise 3 times before moving on.
- Hold each position for 20 to 30 seconds. Remember, bouncing is not good.

Controlling Inflammation

Inflammation is the body's response to injury. It's a chemical change. Severe pain associated with an injury is often linked to localized inflammation. Controlling the inflammation will control the pain. Anti-inflammatory creams such as Arnica or Voltaren (if you must but keep it to a bare minimum and wash your hands after application) can be used to control inflammation or you can use ice.

Using Ice

- Make sure the ice is only applied to the specified area. If you notice a redness or rash developing then discontinue the ice treatment.
- Use an ice pack or 2 ice cubes in a bag or a pack of frozen peas. Wrap this in a moist tea towel.
- **Apply ice for no longer than 10 minutes** (any longer may worsen your condition).
- Remove for 20 minutes then repeat for another 10 minutes. This "on for 10 and off for 20" can be repeated a number of times until the pain is diminished.

Using Arnica

A good quality arnica cream works in the same way as ice. The advantage is that you can rub it on and not have to sit there holding onto an ice pack. Sometimes though, ice works better. I like to do a combination if need be. Ice first then put arnica on.