

Managing acute soft tissue injuries

Information for patients



Acute soft tissue injuries

A soft tissue injury can be painful and take a few weeks to start improving. Good management of your injury in the early stages can reduce your pain and get you back to your normal activities quicker. This leaflet is based on the most up to date information. This information might be different to how you have been advised to manage a soft tissue injury in the past.

If you are worried, ask your GP or physiotherapist for advice.

Protection- avoid activities and movements that cause pain for the first few days after the injury.



Elevation - raise the injured limb as much as possible - your ankle or knee should be raised to waist height when sitting, your wrist should be raised above your shoulder.

Avoid anti-inflammatories - do not take ibuprofen, naproxen or diclofenac for the first 3-4 days after an injury. Inflammation is an important stage of the healing process, so stopping inflammation can affect healing. This includes ice- although it can help with pain, we are beginning to think it stops important inflammation. If you would like to use ice to reduce your pain, make sure you have a cold, damp towel between the ice pack and the injured area. Ice should only be applied for 10-15 minutes at a time. Your skin should return to normal temperature before re-applying an ice pack.

Paracetamol can be helpful to control pain without being anti-inflammatory and disrupting the healing process.

Compression - Using an elastic bandage or taping can stop lots of swelling and help with making you more comfortable. You should check your fingers/toes are not turning pale. If this is happening or if you are experiencing pins and needles or numbness, the compression is too tight, and you should either loosen or remove it. Never sleep in a compression.

Pain as a guide - Be guided by your pain in the early stages as to how to get back to activity. For example - if you can't walk pain free then you are not ready to run. If a movement or activity increases your pain, you may not be ready to do that yet.

Heart rate - Think about doing things that increase your heart rate to bring more blood flow into the soft tissues and help healing. Power walking can help the healing of even a shoulder injury!

Exercise - As pain allows, start flexibility, strengthening and balance exercises to restore normal function to the injured area. If exercises increase your pain, stop these and seek further advice.

Feel positive - Soft tissue injuries heal. If you have any concerns, contact your GP practice for further advice and signposting.

Useful Links

Visit the links or scan the QR codes below for more information.

NHS Inform Self Help Exercises - by body region:

www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/muscle-bone-and-joints



NHS Lothian Musculoskeletal Self Help information - by body region:

<https://services.nhslothian.scot/musculoskeletal/>



Chartered Society of Physiotherapy- Managing Bone, Joint and Muscle Pain:

www.csp.org.uk/conditions/managing-pain-home



References

Dubois et al. 2020. BJSM <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/54/2/72>

Vuurberg et al. 2018. BJSM <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/52/15/956.full.pdf>

