

MANAGING ACHES AND PAINS **AFTER INJURY**

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Picture this: It's a cool September Saturday morning and you're enjoying a set on the tennis court with a group of friends. Your opponent delivers a blistering serve out wide and as you lunge to return the ball, you feel a tweak in your thigh. What was once an enjoyable outing has now resulted in a wincing limp and an early return to weekend chores!

Injuries like the one above are common in today's weekend warrior. Whether a seasoned athlete or a casual partaker, muscle strains and joint sprains increase in frequency due to the many changes in our bodies as we age. These changes include:

- **Decreased flexibility**
- **Decreased muscle strength**
- **Increased joint arthritis**
- **Decreased reaction times**
- **Decreased balance/stability**

Whether young or old, how should one manage injuries from a sporting event? There are several practices, both founded in science and tradition, that can improve your recovery. If you have the misfortune of aches and pains after activity, consider the following to bring relief:

ICE: Ice is a great option for a new injury since it offers the ability to reduce pain and inflammation. Most effective in the first 24-72 hours, ice will help reduce swelling and slow the inflammatory process that occurs with injury. In addition, ice numbs the area and reduces the brain's perception of pain.

HEAT: Heat soothes a sore area by encouraging relaxation of tight muscles, making it suitable for a muscle strain in the back or limbs. In addition, heat increases blood flow to an area which brings oxygen and nutrients to healing tissue.

ICE/HEAT COMBINATION: Alternating between heat and ice (every 20 minutes) offers the best of both worlds, bringing blood flow to an area and reducing swelling. In addition, the combination of hot and cold sensation keeps the brain distracted from the pain.

EPSOM SALT BATHS: Supported gently in research, Epsom salt baths have been proven to reduce aches and pains by increasing the magnesium content in the tissue, a necessary element in tissue healing and function. When compared to a warm water soak without salt (also beneficial), Epsom salt is slightly more effective for chronic arthritic conditions.¹

ELEVATION/COMPRESSION: If your injury has resulted in swelling of a limb, elevating that limb will help reduce the excessive fluid (or edema) that results from an injury. In order for this to be effective, the limb should ideally be elevated higher than the heart. Adding compression like an ace wrap or neoprene sleeve will help to further reduce the excessive fluid and provide a sense of security to the unstable limb.

MOVEMENT: While all of the above will help to reduce pain, the most critical and effective technique for improving your situation and enhancing healing of the tissue is movement.

Movement is medicine since it encourages blood flow, brings nutrients, restores normal body movement, and maintains flexibility of the injured area. If pain limits movement tolerance, consider a mild over the counter pain medicine (with your doctor's permission) or the addition of heat/ice to allow movement with reduced symptoms. By restoring normal movement as early as possible, healing will accelerate and your ability to restore normal tasks will be enhanced.

If your pain does not improve in 48 hours, consider a consultation with your favorite physical therapist. In all 50 states, you can see a PT without a doctor's referral, allowing you to seek care immediately. In many cases, you can get an appointment with a physical therapist within a day, providing you quick and accessible solutions for your injury.

Don't let pain keep you from enjoying your favorite activities. While your physical therapist may not be able to return that blistering serve for you this fall, she'll certainly be on the sidelines cheering!

References:

Deshmukh J, Ray S. Effectiveness of application of hot water with Epsom salt v/s plain hot water on knee joint pain among geriatric women. The Pharma Innovation Journal 2019; 8(6):434-441.



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