DOMS: Muscle Soreness

Why you are so sore two days later, and what helps

Tips from your exercise physiologist at Ace Sports Medicine

ACE SPORTS MEDICINE
UPPER MOUNT GRAVATT

Deep muscle soreness that arrives the day after unaccustomed exercise, and is often worse on day two, is delayed onset muscle soreness. It typically peaks 24 to 72 hours after exercise and resolves over roughly five to seven days.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DOMS

1 THE TIMELINE

Soreness builds over the first 24 hours, peaks between 24 and 72 hours, and resolves over roughly five to seven days. Worse on day two is normal.

DAY TWO SORENESS IS THE CLASSIC PATTERN.

2 NOT LACTIC ACID

Lactic acid clears within hours of finishing. DOMS is driven by unaccustomed load, particularly eccentric work: lowering weights, downhill running, big step-downs.

BLAME THE NEW LOAD, NOT THE LACTATE.

3 WHAT WORKS

A 99-study meta-analysis found active recovery, massage, compression garments, water immersion and contrast therapy all measurably reduced soreness.

SEVERAL TOOLS GENUINELY HELP.

4 MASSAGE LEADS

In the same 99-study analysis, massage was the most effective single technique for both soreness and perceived fatigue.

THE BEST-SUPPORTED SINGLE OPTION.

5 THE REPEATED BOUT EFFECT

One exposure to an exercise protects the muscle against soreness from the same exercise for weeks afterwards. Graded starts beat boom-and-bust Septembers.

START SMALL, PROGRESS GRADUALLY.

6 SORE VS INJURED

DOMS is dull, both-sided and settles over days. Sharp, immediate, one-sided pain that behaves like an injury is not DOMS and warrants assessment.

DULL AND BOTH SIDES: SORENESS. SHARP AND ONE SIDE: CHECK IT.

IS THIS NORMAL?

Usually yes, after a new programme, a return to sport or a big session. It is temporary and protective. Soreness that is one-sided, severe, associated with swelling or very dark urine, or that behaves like an injury, is different and needs assessment.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

- Pain is sharp, immediate or clearly one-sided
- A specific spot hurts rather than a whole muscle group
- Swelling accompanies the soreness
- Soreness is severe or not settling after a week
- Urine turns very dark after a hard session
- You keep getting wrecked by normal training

Very dark urine after severe soreness warrants prompt medical review.

WHAT CAN AN EXERCISE PHYSIOLOGIST DO?

- Distinguish soreness from injury
- Build a graded return to training
- Use the repeated bout effect deliberately
- Dose eccentric work sensibly
- Plan recovery that has evidence behind it
- Link in remedial massage where useful

WHAT YOU CAN DO NOW

Starting back this spring? Set next week up well:

- **Keep moving with easy activity**
- **Start new programmes gradually**
- **Consider massage or compression**
- **Book a graded programme**

Please discuss specifics at an appointment. Soreness fades, the habit is the prize.

Helping You Perform at Your Best

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Need support with muscle soreness?

Book your appointment today

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