

Joints & Muscle Pain

What is muscle pain?

Muscle pain is a general term referring to a symptom or symptoms which arise as a result of a wide number of health conditions. Pain may be present in one specific area of a muscle such as when a muscle strain occurs, or be more widespread during viral infections such as the flu. Doctors refer to muscle pain as myalgia and this gives the root word to the terms such as fibromyalgia (pain in the muscles and soft tissues of the body) as well as polymyalgia rheumatica, a condition giving rise to pain in the head and related to an autoimmune condition.

Causes of muscle pain

The most common causes of muscle pain are generally acute or happen suddenly. Injury or trauma to a muscle sometimes associated with a joint sprain. Overuse of a muscle this is seen when one makes an impromptu and over-enthusiastic visit to the gym. Repetitive strain injuries are related to overuse of a joint, but the muscles surrounding the joint may also be involved. Tension or stress giving rise to conditions such as a stiff neck. Lifting a heavy object can give rise to muscle pain and spasms which we refer to as low back pain or lumbago. Viral infections, including colds and flu. Less common causes of muscle pain are fibromyalgia, the use of certain drugs, as well as autoimmune conditions. These tend to be chronic conditions.

Treatment of muscle pain

Most acute episodes of muscle pain can usually be treated quite easily. If pain relates to an injury or overuse of the muscle or joint, stop the activity and rest. Apply an ice pack or ice compress to the area. If you don't have the appropriate device or equipment, a convenient way to achieve this is with a bag of frozen peas. You may wish to use a pain-killer to help you cope with the pain. Alternatively, you might wish to use a herbal remedy. If your muscle pain is due to flu, you may benefit from using a herbal remedy such as echinacea.

Chronic episodes of muscle pain can respond to:

- » Gentle massage if appropriate
- » Regular but gentle exercise, such as walking, cycling or swimming
- » Reducing the stress levels in the body using yoga or herbal remedies
- » Getting enough sleep
- » Lastly, of course, treating the underlying condition

If you are taking prescribed medication, check with your doctor that this is not one of the side effects of your medication. Muscle pain may arise from a very wide number of conditions. The lists of causes and possible treatments provided in sections 2 and 3 above only refer to commonly encountered health conditions and are not exhaustive. If you do not have specific cause for your muscle pain, or if it does not resolve within 7 days, or if it is accompanied by more severe symptoms such as pain in other parts of the body, fever or a general feeling of being unwell, you should seek medical help immediately.