



Exercise Hurts...is it normal?

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At some point in our lives, we have all been sore. After beginning a new exercise routine, or even after doing a little extra in our current exercise routine, we have experienced some muscle soreness. A question that I have been asked by patients in physical therapy after experiencing pain related to muscle soreness, "is this normal?"

There are several causes of muscle soreness following activity. The most common cause is normal microtrauma of muscle fibers known as delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS). This microtrauma allows the muscle fibers to recover and rebuild to increase strength and endurance and is a normal process after exertion of that muscle. This type of muscle soreness is usually felt 12-48 hours after the exercise performed and peaks between 48-72 hours.

A less common cause of muscle soreness is a muscle strain. Muscle strain is a more traumatic tear of the muscle fibers that can be felt immediately during exercise. This type of tear is abnormal and causes increased swelling and bruising. Pain or soreness from a muscle strain will likely last greater than 72 hours after the injury.

Normal muscle soreness after exercise should decrease significantly 72 hours after the exercise and will never cause bruising or excessive swelling. If you are experiencing muscle soreness lasting greater than 72 hours after an activity, or if you notice bruising and swelling of muscles or joints you should seek treatment from a physical therapist. A physical therapist can help you determine activities that are safe for you to be doing and also provide modalities to decrease pain and swelling related to the injury.