

Leaflet 9 Lower Limb Muscle Strain

Following a strain to your thigh or calf muscles, you may have pain, swelling, bruising and even some muscle spasm. This is because of inflammation in the tissues that have been strained. If you follow the advice given on this sheet, it will speed up your recovery and minimize future problems.

If your doctor has suggested painkillers it is important that you take them regularly to get the full benefit.

Protection

It is important to use any supports that may have been given to you, such as crutches or slings. It is not necessary to completely avoid moving the injured part, in fact gentle exercise will be beneficial.

Rest

For the first few days after injury, it may help to restrict your normal activities, particularly those involving stress being placed on the injured area or movements that cause or increase pain, such as weight-bearing through the affected part.

Although the injured area should be rested during the early stages, the joints above and below should still be moved. As you start to feel better, gradually move the affected part more and gradually start to take more weight when you walk.

Ice

Use ice to reduce the swelling/bruising/muscle spasm and pain. Apply crushed ice or frozen peas in a damp towel for 10-15 minutes. This can be applied every two hours as necessary. Do not put ice directly onto the skin.

Compression

For the first 72 hours use an elastic bandage or tubigrip to apply compression to the injured area. This compression should be a minimum of six inches above and below the site of injury, making sure that even pressure is felt throughout.

Check the area below the injured site for coldness/pallor which may suggest that the compression is too tight.

Remove the compression whilst lying down.

Do not apply compression if you have any problems with your circulation or if you have had a recent thrombosis.

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Elevation

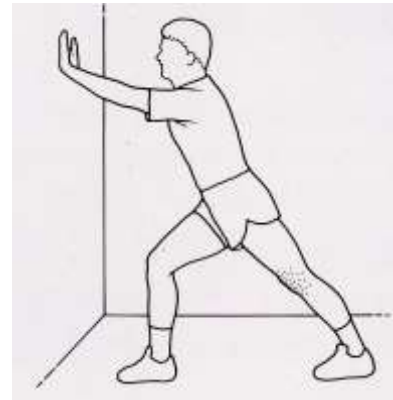
Elevate the injured area above the level of the heart as much as possible for the first 72 hours. Make sure you support nearby joints while doing this by using pillows etc.

Once the pain and /or swelling begins to ease, you should start to gently stretch the affected tissues. Your doctor will have indicated which of the following stretches are appropriate for you to do. The exercises should be done 3 or 4 times daily. Move into a gentle stretch only. Do not push into pain.

Although you should avoid using heat for the first 72 hours, after this you may find it helpful, particularly before and after you do the stretches. You could use a wheat pack or a hot water bottle (make sure it has a cover).

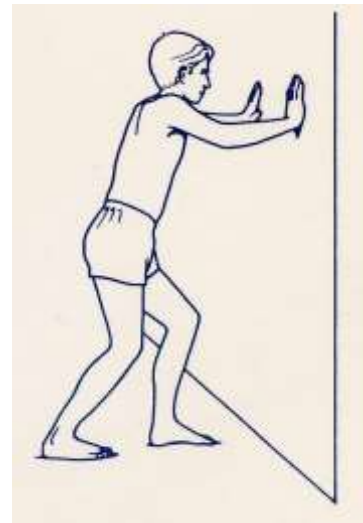
Achilles tendon stretch

Stand with one foot in front of the other about 2 feet apart (injured foot at the back). Keeping your heels on the floor and your back knee straight, bend your front knee until you can feel a stretch in your calf and hold for 15 seconds. Lean against a wall for support if required. Repeat 4 to 5 times, 3 times daily.



Soleus calf stretch.

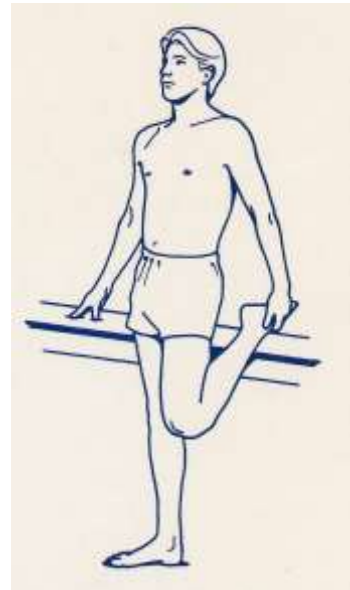
Place the affected leg behind the other, about one foot apart. Keeping back leg slightly bent, with heel on floor and turned slightly outward, lean into wall until a stretch is felt in the back calf. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds and repeat 4 to 5 times, three times daily.



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Quadriceps stretch.

Holding onto something with one hand, with the other, gently pull heel of the affected leg towards your buttock until a stretch is felt in the front of the thigh. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds and repeat 4 to 5 times, three times daily.



Hamstring stretch

Sit with the affected leg straight out in front of you. Tuck foot of the other leg near the groin area. Reach along the straight leg until a stretch is felt in the back of the thigh. Hold the stretch for 15 seconds and repeat 4 to 5 times, three times daily.



Inner Thigh/Groin stretch

Sitting on the floor, keep back straight, press knee down towards the floor and hold.

Hold for 15 seconds and repeat 4 to 5 times, three times daily.



Continue the exercises until your symptoms resolve. This may take up to 10 weeks. Only return to sporting activities when you have full movement and good balance.