

# TerranearPMC Safety Share

## Week of March 13, 2017 – Pulled Muscles

Many people make New Year's resolutions pertaining to getting into shape and joining a gym. So now it's March and those of us that have made it this far and have not given up - a special word of encouragement is definitely in order. And for those of us that somehow have found excuses to give up on commitments, have no fear, you can always get back up and try once more: Maybe with not so much gusto this time! Just take it easy and don't set yourself with too lofty a goal. Maybe you stopped because you were too enthusiastic and quite possibly - pulled a muscle. And that can hurt!

We use the term, "pull a muscle" whenever we physically overdo it and wind up hurting and take one day off from exercising, then possibly that one day off felt so good, we decide to extend our time off to another day, and then another and then another. And soon we have found our perfect excuse to go back to our old couch potato ways!

What exactly is a pulled muscle? A pulled or strained muscle is one that has been overstretched due to physical activity, resulting in swelling and pain. Pulled muscles are common injuries that can usually be effectively treated at home.

Pulled muscles are actually rips in muscle fibers, and further exertion could cause the tear to grow larger and lead to a serious injury. Let the amount of pain you feel be your guide. If a pulled muscle occurs while you're running or playing a sport and you have to stop due to the severe pain, the best thing to do is sit the rest of the game out. And yes, in many cases it is wise to take a few days to recover from the pulled muscle before resuming this activity.

Should one apply heat or cold to a pulled muscle? Well, the answer is "cold." Icing the area reduces swelling and helps ease the pain. An effective way to apply cold is to fill a plastic bag (one of those zip-lock types) with ice cubes. Wrap it in a thin towel, to protect your skin from getting damaged by direct ice. Hold the ice pack to your sore area for 20 minutes at a time several times a day until the swelling has gone down. Also, a bag of frozen peas or another vegetable also works as well as an ice pack. And avoid using heat as this will not reduce inflammation.

Wrapping the site of the pulled muscle can provide support to prevent further injury. Use an ace bandage to loosely wrap your arm or leg. Don't wrap the area too tightly as you might inhibit circulation. If you don't have an ace bandage, cut an old pillowcase into one long strip and use it to compress the area.

Raising the inflamed area can help the swelling go down. If you pulled a muscle in your leg, rest it on an ottoman or chair while you're sitting. If you pulled a muscle in your arm, you can elevate it using a sling.

How about pain medication? Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) such as aspirin or ibuprofen (less than 800 milligrams) reduces pain and help you move around more easily with a pulled muscle. Be sure to take no more than the recommended dosage.



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If your pain remains intense it's time to see a doctor as you may have suffered something more than a simple pulled muscle. You may even need the aid of crutches or a sling so that the injury receives complete rest. Prescription-strength painkillers may also be administered. In rare cases, a pulled muscle requires physical therapy or surgical care.

Sometimes muscle pain is related to something besides overexertion. You may think you pulled a muscle; but if you experience the following, make an appointment to see a doctor:

- Signs of infection, like itchiness and red, raised skin.
- Bite marks in the area of soreness.
- Poor circulation or numbness in the area where the muscle pain is felt.

In addition, if your muscle soreness is accompanied by any of these severe symptoms, go to the emergency room or immediate care center to find out what's going on:

- Your muscles feel extremely weak.
- You have shortness of breath or dizziness.
- You have a stiff neck and a fever.

As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, so here are a few ounces of things that can definitely help avoid a painful experience due to a muscle strain.

**Warm up.** Pulled muscles happen when your muscles get overstrained, which can often occur as a result of exerting yourself before you've properly warmed up. Take the time to stretch and get your muscles warmed up before you participate in a physical activity. If you enjoy running, take a light jog before doing sprints or faster running. If you play a team sport, jog, play catch, or do light calisthenics before diving into the game.

**Do strength training.** Incorporating weightlifting and other strength training into your exercise routine can help prevent the chance that you'll pull a muscle during an activity. Use free weights at home or work out in the weight room at the gym to build a solid, strong core and keep your muscles limber.

**And always, know when to stop!** It's easy to get caught up in the moment when you're doing a physical activity and force yourself to keep going even when the pain in your leg or arm indicates you should stop. Remember that putting more strain on a pulled muscle will only make things worse. If you cause a deeper tear, you may have to sit out for an entire season instead of just one game.

These are some of the basics to help keep you moving forward and maintaining your motivation for keeping that commitment towards making a better you – whether it's a new year's resolution or you just felt it was time to do something good for yourself!

**In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on.**

Robert Frost

