

Acute Soft Tissue Injury Management

This provides you with information on how to manage an acute soft tissue injury using 'POLICE' guidance.

An example of a soft tissue injury is a muscle 'pull' or a ligament sprain. A soft tissue injury can occur with sudden trauma such as a twisted ankle, a blow to your arm or a pull of your hamstring or calf muscles.

Many people will know the acronym RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation) or even PRICE (Protection, Ice Compression, Elevation). The change in the guidance has happened because the research has shown that together with protection of the painful area, Optimal Loading of the area to positively stress the tissues helps recovery. Too much rest can lead to joint stiffness and muscle weakness. This can delay return to normal function.

It is sometimes difficult to know what loading is optimal as this will be different for different parts of the body and between a muscle and ligament. In the early phases, you can use pain as an indicator. Do not be afraid to move and use the injured area within your pain limit. Ensure that you use painkillers, a mild pain is to be expected in the early days and you may feel this when you initially start to move or when you are pushing the limits of your movement. If the pain starts to decrease as you continue to gently move or withdraw from the limits of movement, this is normal. If the pain persists or gets worse it is an indication that you are probably doing too much.

You need to make sure that you keep making headway with what you are doing, as this will help your injury heal better. For most people most symptoms will ease in the first 2 to 6 weeks for a new onset of pain or a flare-up of longstanding condition. It can take some people longer to get back to their normal and some describe ongoing problems.

An assessment of your problem and treatment may be necessary if the POLICE guidance and self-management advice in Step 2 and Step 3 on the Move Better Gwent website does not help.

Consider seeking further help.

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P Protection

In the first few days following an injury, the injured area should be protected from further damage. This does not mean that you should stop using it completely though. This might mean initially reducing the amount on weight you take through the injured area or how far you move the injured tissues.

OL Optimal Loading

This describes the gentle motion gradual loading of tissues to stimulate their ability to accept load. You can start optimal loading while in the protection phase. You may need to use slings, crutches or braces to help.

I Ice

Applying ice to an injured muscle or joint may help to manage swelling and can help decrease acute pain. Ice and cold packs should be wrapped in a soft cloth or towel to avoid direct contact with bare skin. Ice should not be used for more than 10 mins but can be repeated 2-3 times through the day.

C Compression

Compression is thought to help control swelling by reducing blood flow. Compressing the injury can also make it feel better. Compression involves using a bandage to wrap the injured limb.

E Elevation

Elevation involves raising the limb above the level of the heart, again to reduce blood flow and to help with pain control. Elevation is simple for certain body parts. An injured ankle or knee can be placed on a stack of pillows while you are lying down. For elbow or wrist injuries, you will need to use something, such as a pillow or cushion, to elevate your entire arm.

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