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Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness (DOMS)

What are DOMS?

DOMS or delayed onset muscle soreness is a particular type of muscle soreness that sets in hours after exercise. The exercise is usually very hard or far more than the athlete would normally be accustomed to. In particular eccentric muscular contractions (where the muscle lengthens as it contracts) such as in hopping, bounding and other plyometric exercise, running downhill, squatting and the lowering phase when lifting weights, can cause DOMS.

DOMS usually occurs 12-48 hours post-exercise. Muscle aching and tightness are the most common symptoms, often resulting in a decreased range of motion. Any discomfort should start to ease within 3 days post-exercise and return to normal within a week. If your symptoms persist, it is definitely worth visiting your Doctor or a sports injury specialist to get it checked.



What causes DOMS?

DOMS is thought to be caused by microscopic muscle tears which occur when we exercise harder than usual. This is a normal process which is required for growth in muscle size and strength. However, if training is progressed too quickly excessive tearing can occur, which results in DOMS. Also if you start a sport or exercise which your body is not accustomed to, DOMS can occur for the first few sessions. This is one of the reasons why training should start very lightly and progress gradually.



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Treating DOMS:

Time - allow the muscles to heal without over stressing them again - wait at least a week and until all symptoms have cleared before performing the same exercise again.

Massage may help reduce the effects. Very light, preferably non weight bearing aerobic exercise and stretching may also be beneficial to improve the blood flow, warm the muscles and improve range of motion. Hydrotherapy and spa baths may help reduce the effects of DOMS. Alternating hot and cold baths - although there is no scientific proof that this is effective it is often used by professional athletes who believe it to be beneficial.

Preventing DOMS

The best way of treating DOMS, is by preventing it! Always perform a warm-up prior to any high intensity exercise. Always cool-down and stretch following exercise. When starting a new activity, do little and often to allow your muscles to become accustomed to these new strains. Whether you are a regular exerciser or a beginner, build-up gradually and allow your body time to recover in-between sessions. As a general rule, do not increase training intensity and duration by more than 10% per week!