



STRONG WOMEN TRAINING CLUB

Why you shouldn't try to prevent post-run DOMS (and how to navigate recovery)

BY LAUREN GEALL 28 DAYS AGO



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What's the best way to manage post-run muscle soreness while still maximising the benefits of your training? We asked the experts to explain all.

Thankfully, the days of 'no pain, no gain' fitness seem to be mostly behind us. In 2023, it's rare to see exercise framed as a form of punishment or discipline – instead, you'll see a focus on the mental and physical benefits of movement for overall health and wellbeing.

However, while exercise should ultimately be a joyful experience, there will always be parts of it that are uncomfortable. This is especially true when you're trying to improve: no matter what form of exercise or sport you're passionate about, making progress is going to involve some kind of ache or stiffness due to the way our bodies adapt. And with running, this ache is usually located in the leg muscles.

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As you likely already know, delayed onset muscle soreness – or DOMS – is the name commonly given to this kind of discomfort; many people find it to be one of the more frustrating parts of exercise. But while avoiding DOMS altogether may sound like the dream, it might not be the best way to maximise your potential. In fact, the way you approach and deal with muscle soreness both before and after your runs can make a difference to your overall progress.

So, what's the best way to manage muscle soreness while still maximising the benefits of your training? We asked the experts to explain all.

What causes DOMS after a run?



No matter how far you've come in your running journey, chances are you've experienced sore legs plenty of times after a run. You may not experience pain every time, but if you've upped your distance, speed or terrain, you're more likely to get DOMS.

"Delayed onset muscle soreness is a type of muscle damage experienced following high-intensity exercise as a result of myofibril [muscle filament] tears," explains Matthew Glithero, a musculoskeletal specialist, osteopath and pilates instructor at [Wellthy Clinic](#).

"While any muscular work may induce general exhaustion, DOMS is particularly caused by eccentric contractions [muscle lengthening exercises]," Sansoni adds. "This causes an inflammatory response which results in intramuscular fluid, electrolyte changes, pain, heat and relative functional impairment."

"The overload principle of training has the aim of adaptation, and the soreness is a way of our natural system reminding us that improvement only comes through adequate rest and recovery," explains James Thie, head coach at [Coopah Run Coach](#), the official training provider for the [Royal Parks Half Marathon](#).

"It's important to listen to the body and make sure that any soreness is related to changes in variables and that rest and recovery is a structured part of your training plan."

[Max Willcocks](#), an endurance and ultra-trail athlete and running coach, agrees.

"Muscle aches are a good indicator that you have fatigued or over-trained certain muscles, so rather than being a bad sign they are simply an indicator that you need to avoid over-stressing them further," he says.

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While you might wish to rid yourself of DOMS as soon as possible, disrupting the inflammatory healing response that is triggered in response to the muscle tears can actually stand in the way of your progress, the experts add.

This is why so many experts advise against using anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen to deal with DOMS – they can delay the healing of the muscle tears by inhibiting that inflammatory response, potentially reducing the magnitude of the training adaptations made in the process.

How to reduce DOMS pain without compromising recovery



While you don't want to stand in the way of your body's natural healing abilities, there are steps you can take to speed up the process and make it feel a little less painful.

Use an ice pack

There's a reason why ice packs are often held up as the gold standard for muscle ache – not only can they reduce pain by numbing the area, they can also speed up the healing process.

Willcocks explains: "Using an ice pack diverts blood flow away from the surface and deeper into the muscle tissue to help irradiate the toxins from muscular breakdown and the lactic acid from anaerobic respiration. The muscles have already been broken down during the training, and the body is working to rebuild them."

Fuel your body

To repair your muscles, your body needs plenty of fuel, so ensuring you get the correct balance of nutrients (especially post-workout) will help to make the healing process a little smoother.

“Refuelling is fundamental pre, during and after training,” Thie explains. “This is in relation to the correct balance of carbohydrates and proteins. The latter is especially important in the 30-minute window post-training to help the body repair itself over the next few hours and days.”

He continues: “Being hydrated with current levels of electrolytes and minerals will definitely help the body fatigue less and recover faster.”

Do some gentle movement

You don't want to risk damaging your muscles further, but some light, gentle movement can really help to encourage the healing process.

“DOMS will ease over time, but the very best way to cope with it is to keep moving at a much gentler pace or with a supported exercise like swimming,” Pritchard says.

Doing this will help to promote blood flow to the affected areas, which will help to carry away the muscular breakdown and supply the muscle with oxygen and nutrients.

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