

# Acute Musculoskeletal (MSK) Pain and Injury



Polyclinics  
SingHealth



*Disclaimer: Please note that the instructions shown are strictly for general information only.  
If you have any queries, kindly check with your healthcare provider.*



SCAN ME



## What causes acute MSK pain?

Musculoskeletal (MSK) pain is pain that affects the bones, joints, ligaments, tendons or muscles.

Acute pain refers to pain that is sudden and intense.

Common causes of acute MSK pain include:

- Trauma (e.g. sprains, falls, fractures, dislocations)
- Overuse of certain muscles or tendons
- Lifting of excessively heavy loads



## What are the signs & symptoms of acute MSK pain?

- Patients with MSK pain may experience sharp pain or ache
- They may also describe the muscles as having twitches, burning sensations, feeling pulled or overworked
- Pain may worsen with activities (e.g carrying things or weight bearing on your injured limb) and movement, and improve with rest and painkillers
- There may be swelling and heat at the affected area
- Short duration of stiffness
- Sleep disturbances



## How long does it take to recover?

Acute MSK pain usually improves within 1 to 2 weeks. The pain generally lasts less than 6 weeks.

## **D** You should seek medical attention early if you have...

- Inability to weight bear (support body weight) on the injured limb after a fall or injury
- Severe pain that does not improve with rest or medications
- Pain that severely affects your activities
- Significant numbness, weakness or tingling sensation in the arms or legs
- Swelling, redness or severe pain affecting multiple joints
- Difficulty controlling urination or bowels
- Fever
- Unexplained weight loss

## **E** Do you need an X-ray or other imaging scans?





Most types of MSK pains do not require X-ray or advanced imaging such as CT scan or MRI.

Your doctor will evaluate your symptoms and may order X-rays if necessary (eg. a fall or trauma).



## **F** What are your treatment options in the clinic?

Depending on the condition, your healthcare provider may recommend:

Medications	Physiotherapy	Activity modifications and pain education	Injections
			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requires review and prescription from doctor</li><li>• A short duration of painkillers helps to relieve your pain so you can stay active while your body recovers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appropriate exercises can help you recover and regain your normal function</li><li>• Therapeutic modalities e.g. therapeutic ultrasound or extracorporeal shockwave therapy (ESWT)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your doctor or physiotherapist may provide advice on ergonomics, modification of activities and pain management after the assessment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For some specific conditions, the doctor may recommend a steroid injection to the affected area</li></ul>

## **G** Do I need to see a specialist?

Most types of MSK pain can be managed in primary care (e.g. Polyclinics).





Your healthcare provider will evaluate your condition and refer you to see a specialist only when necessary.

# Self-help tips to manage your pain

If you have an acute muscle strain or sprain, try the **POLICE** principles to reduce pain and help with recovery.

P	O L	I	C	E
Protect	Optimal Loading	Ice	Compression	Elevation
				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect your painful area from further injury</li> <li>• Rest the injured area for a short period of time (e.g. 1 to 3 days), but avoid prolonged immobility which may lead to joint stiffness</li> <li>• Depending on the condition, you may consider using some form of support (e.g. bandage, brace, splint) or crutches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Right amount of activity can stimulate healing</li> <li>• Gradually build up your range of movement and try putting weight on the injured limb</li> <li>• Get active early when you can tolerate it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply cold pack (e.g. a bag of ice wrapped in a towel), onto the painful area</li> <li>• Do this for about 10 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for the first few days to reduce pain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compress the injured area using a bandage to reduce swelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elevate your injured arm above your heart level</li> <li>• Put your injured leg on a chair or cushion to reduce swelling</li> </ul>

Avoid **HARM** for the first few days of your injury.

H	A	R	M
<b>Heat</b>	<b>Alcohol</b>	<b>Running</b>	<b>Massage</b>
			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not use heat rub, heat pack, take hot showers or saunas after an injury</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consuming alcohol can worsen the swelling and slow down recovery</li><li>• It also increases the risk of you hurting yourself again</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• After an injury, right amount of exercise can promote healing</li><li>• However, strenuous activity such as running may cause further injury and worsen pain</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not massage the injured area for the first day or two, because it can cause bruising and more swelling</li></ul>

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Note:

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