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Soft tissue injury

A patient's guide

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Date published: 29/11/2016
Review date: 28/11/2018
Ref: Icam/Msk/Sft/01

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What is soft tissue injury?

A soft tissue injury is a term used for injuries to ligaments, tendons and muscles, causing tenderness, pain and swelling.

Quick and appropriate action is very important for recovery so the first 24 hours following injury are crucial. When soft tissue is damaged, blood vessels are usually damaged too. Swelling and increased pressure can cause pain and muscle spasm, which is all part of the healing process, but excessive swelling can slow this down.

To help reduce the amount of bleeding at the injury site you can follow this simple procedure:

- **Rest,**
- **Ice,**
- **Compression,** and
- **Elevation.**

Rest - helps to reduce the pain. Stop activity immediately following injury as continued exercise may result in increased bleeding and swelling to the injured area.

To protect the swollen area rest and support the injury, avoid any excessive exercise (such as sports), but keep the limb gently moving. Normal activity is alright.

Ice – this will help to reduce the swelling and bleeding, helping in a reduction of pain. Wrap an ice pack or anything from the freezer, such as a bag of peas in a damp towel (do not apply ice directly to your skin), apply to area for 10-20 minutes.

Repeat this every two hours for the first 24 hours. After this, gradually reduce the frequency.

Do not use ice if you suffer from circulatory problems.

If unsure, please speak to your physiotherapist.

Compression - helps to reduce swelling and bleeding and provide support. Use a compression (elasticated tubular) bandage and apply to injured area making sure the bandage is both below and above injury.

Elevation - helps to reduce the swelling.

If you have a lower limb injury, raise your leg above hip level. For an upper limb injury make sure it is raised above your heart.

Medication

Anti-inflammatory drugs can slow down your body's healing response, if in doubt, speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

Precautions

In the first 48 hours, avoid using the following treatments as they can make things worse:

- Heat treatments
- Excessive exercising
- Vigorous massage and
- Heat rubs.