Sore No More!

Don't push through the pain!
Instead, follow this advice.

Experts say you can alleviate most exercise aches on your own. The exceptions: "If you've experienced a sudden trauma like a fall, or if the pain persists longer than two weeks, you need to see a doctor," says Sabrina M. Strickland, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon who specializes in sports medicine at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City. Otherwise, you most likely have a nonserious injury that can be identified and treated by following the guide below.

OW/ MY...

LOWER BACK (OR LUMBAR SPINE)

Performs syndrome (a tight or torn muscle) or a herniated disk (some are worse than others). Both injuries put pressure on the sciatic nerve in your back.

HOW IT HAPPENED

The injury is caused by overuse, poor posture, or sudden movements, such as jumping or lifting. The sciatic nerve may be pinched or compressed, causing pain in the low back, buttocks, and legs.

DIY TREATMENT

SEE THE DOC IF...

You also have a fever, leg weakness, or bladder changes. These symptoms may signal an infection or nerve compression.

Swallow 200 mg of ibuprofen or naproxen 500 mg four times a day or aspirin 325 mg every 4 hours for 7 days. AvoidNSAIDs for more than a week. Avoid over-the-counter pain relievers, such as acetaminophen, for at least 1 week after surgery. Keep your head up, avoid heavy lifting, and use a cold pack to help reduce swelling.

SEE THE DOC IF...

Your knee is very swollen and gives you. These signs point to a tear of the ACL or meniscus (knee cartilage).

Loosen your IT band with this move. Lie on your side and support your weight with your forearm. Slip a foam roller under your hip and slowly roll down from your hip to your knee. Repeat this a few times a week. For runner's knee, reduce your mileage to a point that doesn't cause pain, and do leg lifts and press to strengthen your quadriceps and hamstrings.

SEE THE DOC IF...

Pain is localized on the outer edge of the shinbone. You may have a stress fracture.

Switch to a non-weight-bearing exercise like swimming or biking for 2 weeks, and ice the area for 20 minutes after each session.

SEE THE DOC IF...

You can't put any weight on the injured foot, or it's still swollen and painful after three days.

Do the RICE method: Rest. Ice for 20 minutes three times a day, compress with an elastic bandage, and elevate your foot above heart level as much as possible for 48 hours.

SOURCES: Sabrina M. Strickland, M.D., an orthopedic surgeon who specializes in sports medicine at the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, and Stephen H. Pliskin, D.P.M., an assistant professor of surgery at George Washington University Medical School and a member of the American Podiatric Medical Association's Clinical Practice Advisory Committee.