



Pain is not always a gain

"No pain, no gain" is a mantra of seasoned exercisers. Like so many simple statements, this one needs to be applied with care.

Question: Is it impossible to develop fitness without pain?

Answer: The answer probably depends upon your perception of pain, but in general, pain is not necessary to gain the benefits of exercise. Those benefits are the result of the body adapting to the stresses of a specific exercise. This requires allowing the body an adequate period of rest.

Well-designed exercise programs call for a hard day followed by an easy day. If the same muscle groups are overstressed day after day, they can be damaged or fatigued rather than strengthened.

Those dealing with an injury or chronic health problem may need to experience some pain to gain the long-term benefits of exercise. In these

cases, guidance from a health professional is important.

Q: Is there such a thing as "good" pain?

A: Yes. To develop greater strength or endurance, muscles must experience a greater than usual level of physical stress. When the intensity level is significantly above what the body is used to, the "burn," or discomfort, that results can be a good pain in the sense that it can stimulate muscles to adapt without injuring them. This pain should diminish within a couple of hours of rest.

Q: What are the types of "bad" pain?

A: Dr. Edward McFarland, orthopedic surgeon and team physician for Johns Hopkins University, describes two types of bad pain in a recent issue of the American College of Sports Medicine's Health & Fitness Journal. One type is due to overtraining, when an athlete does not rest adequately. The cure is to back off on the exercise program.

The second harmful type of pain is in a specific part of the body, such as a muscle, joint, ligament or bone. A little soreness can simply be a sign that the muscles were exercised, but muscles that are very sore to move or touch can be a sign of excessive damage.

Dr. McFarland says these signs in an extremely out-of-shape individual can be life-threatening when the body responds in ways that overly stress organs such as the kidneys or heart. This is a greater risk with hot and humid conditions, dehydration and in people with blood-related medical conditions.

Q: What are the signs of "bad" pain?

A: Signs include pain that worsens with exercise, lasts more than a few hours, does not ease after rest, impairs sports performance or normal activities and does not diminish over time.

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