



HIGH PERFORMANCE

SPORTS MEDICINE

How to tell the difference between Hurt vs Harm

Every runner will at some point feel an ache or a pain that will force them to ask themselves – Should I keep going? When are you just experiencing pain (i.e. hurt), and when are you putting yourself at risk for an injury (i.e. harm)? To help you differentiate between “hurt and harm” let’s work through a common training scenario that most runners will encounter.

You are working your way through a training program and are feeling pain or soreness in your (fill in the blank) and are wondering – Can I still progress with my plan?

First ask yourself these 3 questions:

- + Did I have any difficulty finishing my last run?
- + Do I have any aches or pains that have lasted more than 2 days?
- + Am I feeling excessively tired the day after my run?

If you answer **NO** to all of these questions, then you can safely continue with your training program as under this circumstance you are likely just experiencing a benign pain.

If you answer **YES** to one or more of the above questions then do not increase your intensity, mileage or do a hill or tempo workout until all answers are **NO** to avoid precipitating an injury. In addition, you will also want to try some self-management techniques (e.g. perform a dynamic warm up prior to the next run, add specific stretches or self-massage after your run, or incorporate cross training). At times, a day off running to work on self-management is in order.

Interpreting your pain:

If your pain comes on during a run, it should never be greater than a 4/10, where 0 is no pain and 10 represents the greatest pain you can imagine. If your pain is above a 4/10 for more than 2 days with rest, you should be assessed by a health care practitioner experienced with sports injuries as you may have an evolving injury.

If you feel pain during the warm up of your run (i.e. the first 5 minutes) but then it goes away, you can safely continue, but monitor the situation. If the pain returns, stop and walk. If it goes away within 1-2mins of walking, then you can try to resume your run. If it returns a second time, stop and do not run again that day. Treat the area with ice and use the 3 questions above to determine when you can return to your training program.

If the pain onsets shortly after your run, and is less than a 4/10, treat with ice, and on your next scheduled training day, repeat the same run but take 10-15% off of your pace or mileage.

If the pain comes on the day after the run, it is likely delayed onset muscle soreness, a.k.a. DOMS. DOMS usually presents 24-48 hours after a new activity or change in your running pace or mileage and can last for 1-3 days. It is the soreness and stiffness that is the normal response of muscles to work. It is the result of the muscle repairing and rebuilding itself due to your hard efforts. You can safely continue to work through your running plan.

Last but not least, it is important that you trust your gut feeling and do not push through pain that doesn't feel productive. When in doubt, get it checked out! It is always better to be proactive than reactive to an injury.

If you think you may have a running related injury or if you would like an assessment in order prevent an injury, you can book an assessment with either the Sports Medicine Doctor or with any of the Physiotherapists and Chiropractors at High Performance Sports Medicine (HPSM). We are conveniently located at the Yonge Eglinton Centre, 2300 Yonge Street, Suite 1604. For more information regarding our clinic and our approach to treatment please visit www.hpsm.ca. To book an appointment please email hello@hpsm.ca or call 416-486-4776 (HPSM).