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Avoiding Pain During Exercise **By: Dr. Stephen O'Neil**

Dear Dr. Steve: What is the best way to avoid the aches and pains associated with starting a new exercise program?

Dr. Steve: This is a good question because it shows that you are taking the initiative and starting to get active. Starting a new exercise routine is a very hard thing to do. Sticking with a routine after the third day when you are so sore that you are avoiding the stairs at work is a true accomplishment.

There are a few different reasons for the soreness after intense activity on just beginning an exercise routine. The main reason for being very sore at the start of an exercise program is because most people tend to do too much, too soon. This is the number one reason people quit a program in the early stages. Going too hard or too heavy can cause some pretty major trauma to the muscles. These are essentially many micro-tears in the muscle fibres. They take a few days to heal and the muscle becomes stronger. In the mean time while the healing takes place you suffer.

Another cause for muscle soreness is the buildup of a metabolic waste product in the muscle known as lactic acid. Lactic acid is a byproduct from the conversion of sugars into energy within the muscle cells. The buildup of lactic acid is what causes muscle fatigue and some of the associated aches and pains post exercise. The best way to avoid this is to always have a cool down after your work out. This means doing some light cardio at a progressively slowing pace and doing some stretching. It is especially important to stretch the large muscles of the body such as back, buttocks, and leg muscles. This will get the most blood flowing and help the muscles flush out impurities including lactic acid. Speaking of flushing, staying hydrated is another way to minimize muscle aches and pains. Drinking plenty of fluids especially water before, during and after exercise is a great way to not only avoid dehydration, but muscle injuries as well. Muscle cells require water to harvest stored energy as well as get rid of harmful byproducts. Staying hydrated will also help damaged cells recover faster.

To recap, the best ways to avoid all the aches and pains are to ease into a new routine, don't go overboard. Drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise. Always cool down properly after exercise with some light cardio and stretching. Get proper rest between workouts and don't over train. Remember, a little muscle soreness from a good workout is a sign that you've made some changes. Try to avoid becoming too sore and stiff but be proud of the little aches; you've earned them. Stick with your exercise program and remember, nothing worth doing is ever easy.