

The Complete Guide To Pole Dancing Muscle Injuries

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As I sit writing this article about pole dancing muscle injuries for you I'm currently in the middle of week three out of six.

I pulled my intercostals a couple of weeks ago and instantly knew this was a six weeks of no training and total rest prescription.

Being fully aware of how to avoid pulling muscles and what to do in the event that I should pull one, I was pretty surprised to have been caught out.

That's why I was inspired to write this guide for those of you who don't know how to avoid muscle injury.

In my case I had stopped moving mid-session and underestimated just how much my body had cooled down. When I came back to the pole to do a lovely twisted ballerina I came away feeling stiff.



I actually didn't realise how badly it was strained until that evening when I couldn't roll over in bed and the pain when moving in certain ways became excruciating.

Recently I read an article that stated 'injury in pole dance is inevitable'. That's a bad statement in my opinion. It's highly probable if you're not very careful, but perfectly preventable.

So with that said let's get down to business!

What You Will Learn

- What To Do If You Pull A Muscle
- How Long The Most Common Muscle Strains Should Be Rested For
- What To Do With Your Time Off From Pole

- Why You Must Be Patient & Rest Properly
- How To Prevent Muscle Injury
- The Top Pole Dancing Muscle Injuries

Discover The Top 7 Pole Dancing Muscle Injuries

Most sports come with a common injury, either by repetitive overuse of muscles, muscle imbalance or from some sort of repetitive strain.

We're blessed in pole dance and fitness to have an array of moves to keep our bodies moving, and if you're smart you'll be training both sides to prevent muscle imbalances.

With that said though, the huge variety of movements and techniques we ask of our bodies also means we have many more potential chances for muscle strain and injury.

I've done a little light research, and these are the **7 most common muscle injuries** arising from pole dancing that I have seen reported.

1. Shoulders (Rotator Cuff & Deltoid Strain)
2. Wrist Sprain
3. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
4. Hamstring Strain
5. Shoulders (Deltoid Strain)
6. Intercostal Strain
7. Forearm Strain

Pole dancing requires a lot of strength and flexibility as we start to progress and if you're not careful, you could end up with one of these muscle injuries!

What Exactly Is A Muscle Strain?

A muscle strain is commonly referred to as 'pulling a muscle'. This is what happens when your muscle is either torn or over-stretched.

You're more prone to pulling a muscle if you are over tired, over training, or not using your muscles correctly.

Not using your muscles correctly can be neglecting to engage your shoulders or stretching beyond your comfortable limits for example.

Pulling a muscle can be very painful, reduce range of movement in the affected area and will definitely put you out of action for a couple of weeks at the very least when it comes to training.

If you have a mild strain it is easily treated at home, provided you take proper care and rest. Some muscle injuries such as a sever strain or a muscle tear could need medical treatment.

How Can I Tell If I've Strained A Muscle & How Bad It Is?

When you initially strain a muscle you'll know about it. More often than not sharp pain occurs straight away and severity ranges from mild strains to severe pulls.

If you experience bruising and swelling then you're looking at a severe strain.

Learn The Tell Tale Signs Of Muscle Strain

These are the **symptoms of a muscle strain**;

- Sudden Pain
- Discomfort & Soreness
- Reduced ROM (Range Of Movement)
- Bruising
- Swelling
- Muscle Spasms
- Feeling Stiff
- Feeling Weak
- A Tight or 'Knotted' Feeling
- (In Some Cases) A Popping Sound

Mild sprains (like the one I have in my intercostals right now) can feel stiff at first but still flexible enough for use.

For that reason I made the mistake of continuing to stretch because I thought I was simply that; 'stiff'.

That's probably what caused my mild strain to get worse by the end of the day, ending in acute pain and some of the strongest painkillers I have ever actually taken.

A severe muscle strain won't be so easy to overlook. When the muscle is severely torn the result is a lot of pain and very limited movement.

There's reason number one to rest properly and take good care of your injury. Continuing to train can often make the strain worse!

What Should I Do If I think I've Pulled A Muscle?

If you suffer a severe muscle strain you should see a doctor. You could need medication, physiotherapy or sometimes even surgery depending on just how bad your injury is.

Here are some examples of times you should **visit a doctor**;

- Your injured area is numb
- You can't move your injured area
- There is blood coming from the area
- You are unable to walk
- You are still in pain after one week

If in doubt, always seek medical assistance.

In the immediate time after you pull a muscle you should follow the RICE procedure. That's Rest, Ice, Compression & Elevation.

Sometimes elevation isn't possible (using my ribs as yet another example), so in this scenario just rest, ice and compression is fine.

Strapping up your muscle will give it the support it needs while it is healing and reduce swelling, be careful not to tie your bandage too tight.

If you don't have [a bandage](#) it's fine to get creative, I strapped my ribs up the first few days with a sarong!

I personally don't like to take medication to reduce soreness in muscles unless it's really necessary.

I think it's a good idea to avoid strong painkillers or things like paracetamol if possible, but in the first 48 hours after a strain anti-inflammatories are not recommended.

Taking painkillers can sometimes lead to your injury becoming more aggravated as you continue to use it without feeling pain, which in turn can lead to a longer road to recovery.

Anti-inflammatories are also thought to slow the healing process, so if you are experiencing pain try to avoid these and stick to paracetamol.

I took a very strong painkiller in the first few days of my intercostal injury, this was not enough to completely subside the pain but it made the days more manageable.

Do not use pain killers to 'fight through' your muscle injury and continue training.

This will make recovery take much longer. It could even increase a 3 month recovery to over a year, even if you think you are only doing 'light exercise'.

Continued use will aggravate the injury, in hamstrings for example it's possible for this to increase the strain on the muscle to a point where surgery is required to treat it where it wasn't needed initially.

Eventually you will be able to do very light and slow range of motion exercises, you should feel no pain doing this.

It's better to keep yourself moving rather than totally immobilising the muscle as this can cause you to become stiff, but you should avoid heavy stretching.

Can I Use Heat To Soothe The Pain?

Don't apply heat to your muscles in the immediate time after a strain. For the initial 48 hours heat will encourage bleeding as it increases blood flow to the area.

At first this isn't what you want and it could be harmful used too soon.

Around three days after your muscle strain it's fine to apply heat, encouraging blood circulation at this point will help the healing process.

Starting at least three days after your strain occurs, using [heat packs](#) a few times a day will help to keep your muscles warm and relaxed, provide relief from pain and speed up recovery.

What If I Just Leave It Alone?

Muscle strains that aren't treated will take longer to heal, you could also experience 'niggling pains' for a long time after the injury should have healed.

You'll also be more prone to pulling those muscles again and can be left feeling stiff and weak in that area.

How Long Should I Rest For?

This question depends on a number of varying factors.

How severe is your muscle strain? Which muscle did you pull?

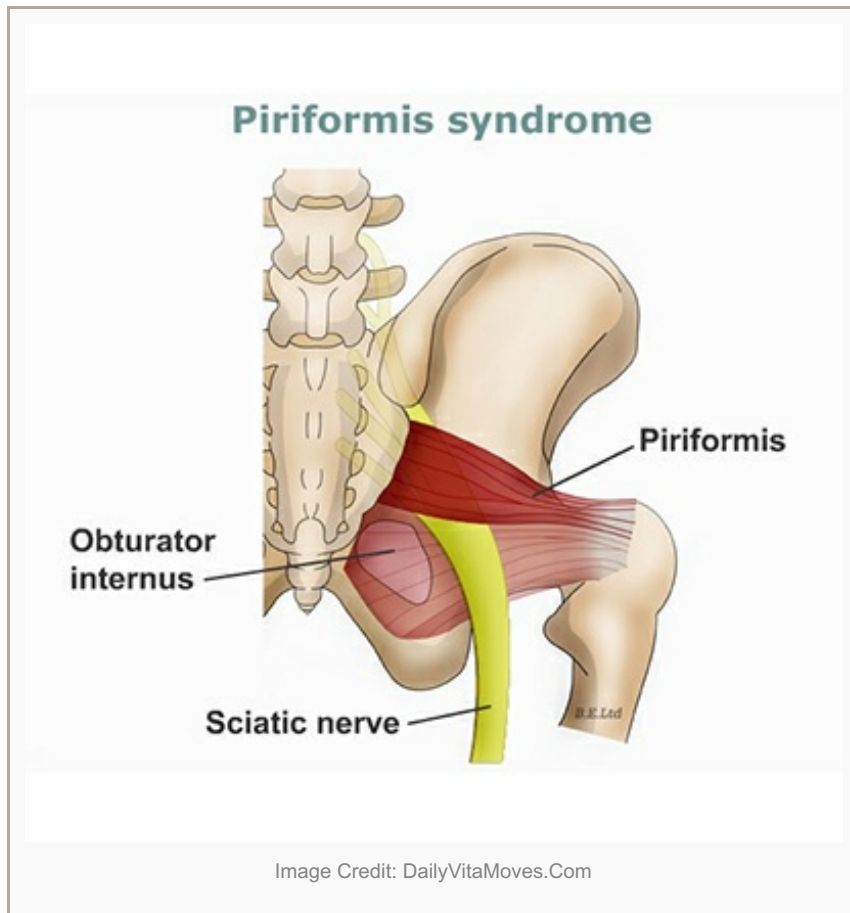
Just slightly pulling a muscle could take a couple of weeks to heal, whereas severe strains can leave you out of action for months at a time.

That's why it's important to see a doctor to make sure you correctly diagnose the affected area.

To give you an example, I once felt a twang at the top of my leg and assumed it was a hamstring strain.

Three months into my injury I had been totally resting it and seen little to no difference in how the affected area felt and it would hurt a lot if I sat for long periods of time, such as driving long distances.

When I finally got this checked out it turned out I had strained my Piriformis muscle, which sits on the sciatic nerve.



Quite the opposite from total rest, an injury like this requires gentle stretching for recovery, so sitting resting was a terrible idea.

As a general guide, here are some common injuries in pole dancing and resting times based on severity.

Shoulders

We'll start with shoulders because they are so [commonly injured in pole dancing](#), usually due to lack of engagement. Despite your teacher teaching you to engage those muscles, you may not understand why that's such a big deal.

The shoulders have two types of muscle controlling your movements. There are four small muscles that hold the ball of your shoulder into the socket; the Rotator Cuff.

Then there are three big muscles that connect your collarbone and shoulder blade to your upper arm; the Deltoids. We'll look at these shoulder muscles separately here.

Rotator Cuff

Avoid doing anything that aggravates the pain and activities that involve reaching overhead.

Once pain has subsided exercises to strengthen the shoulder can help towards a full recovery, you should have total rest from pole dancing until the area is free from discomfort.

Recovery time can vary from three to six weeks but often recurs if no strengthening of the muscle is done to

prevent a repeat injury.

Seeing a physiotherapist for advice is a great idea, they will prescribe you with [an exercise program to complete at home](#) if your symptoms persist.

Rotator cuff injuries are one of the most common in pole dancing and that's because they can be caused by [micro-trauma to the muscles](#) over weeks, months or even years beforehand.

Micro-trauma can be caused by hanging your body weight from your shoulder during pole classes without engaging your muscles correctly.

Deltoids

The Deltoids are much bigger muscles than the rotator cuff and injury is less common, you should always check with a doctor because the strain symptoms are very similar.

For a **mild Deltoid strain** it is fine to do [light exercises to build strength in the muscle](#), as long as you feel no pain when doing so.

With this strain sports massage can also help to speed up recovery.

If you notice any swelling at all you should stay completely rested for at least 7 days and seek advice from your doctor or physiotherapist.

If you experience a severe Deltoid strain you could be out of action for up to twelve weeks, possibly more.

Deltoids are most commonly injured through overuse which can cause discomfort, swelling and reduced range of motion in the shoulder.

Hamstrings

Hamstring strains are diagnosed in grades one, two and three depending on how severe the strain is.

A grade one hamstring strain will feel tight and uncomfortable in the back of your thigh but you should still be able to walk.

If you are limping and feeling pain this is a grade two strain. Grade three will be much more severe and painful, you will experience swelling and may see bruising in the area.

If you experience anything more than a grade one strain you should seek medical advice.

As I mentioned earlier with my Piriformis injury, your sciatic nerve passes through your hamstrings. This means that sometimes other injuries that press against the sciatic nerve can mimic symptoms of hamstring strain.

That is why it is so important to visit your doctor for diagnosis. Resuming training and exercise before your hamstring is fully recovered (even if it 'feels' better) often results in re-injury.

Physiotherapy can help with recovery of a hamstring strain and [Kinesio Taping](#) can reduce likelihood of a repeat strain.

Recovery time varies depending on the severity of your strain, with grade one ranging from between one and three weeks and grade two taking from four to eight weeks.

A severe grade three strain can take anywhere from three to six months to fully heal and may also need surgery to remove scar tissue for recovery.

Common causes of hamstring injury include;

- Stretching for too long allowing muscles to cool and become over-stretched
- Stretching beyond ability
- Stretching without proper warm up
- Stretching without [strengthening the muscle](#)
- Muscle fatigue and overuse
- Muscle imbalances where one muscle group is stronger than the opposite muscle group

Calves

Straining a calf muscle is often very sudden and can give a sharp pain potentially accompanied by a popping sound.

It's common to experience a severe pain, swelling or bruising in the area.

Calf strains can be mild to severe as with any strain and is graded from one to three.

A grade one strain can take around two to four weeks to recover and a grade two takes from four to eight weeks assuming it is treated correctly.

As with hamstring strains, a severe tear of the calf muscle can take three or four months to heal and can sometimes require surgery to remove scar tissue.

In the early stages after straining a calf muscle you're unlikely to be able to walk without a limp, so your calf needs some rest from your body weight.

As your calf starts to handle a little more weight a compressive bandage will help to support the muscle and prevent scar tissue from forming badly.

You should keep your foot up wherever possible, preferably above your heart to help reduce any swelling.

When you can walk without a limp and can [perform simple calf stretches](#) without pain you should do so.

In the six weeks while scar tissue forms in the calf you need to lengthen your scar tissue through gentle [stretching and massage](#).

Lengthening your scar tissue with gentle stretches will prevent a recurring muscle tear in the future.

After you have progressed to holding your full weight on the calf again you should also work to strengthen the muscle.

Again, it's a great idea to see a physio for advice on exercises and recovery.

In short, you don't need complete rest for this injury but you should gradually build strength and flexibility in the calf to rehabilitate the injury before returning to your normal training routines.

In the past I experienced a mild calf strain through no exercise or movement at all, just [from extreme cramp](#) in the muscle!

The most common cause of calf tears in pole dancing is too much pressure put on the back of the knee during certain moves where you might hold on to your foot instead of gripping the pole with your leg.

An example of moves like this could be a Baby Cupid or Suicide Spin, which leads us to another injury caused by these types of moves...

The Back Of The Knee

There are four ligaments around your knee joint which can also be injured by moves like the ones described above.

Injuring any one of these ligaments will often have very similar symptoms.

A knee ligament strain or tear can often include a popping sound, swelling and pain around the knee and reduced range of motion.

If you think you have a knee ligament injury you should see your doctor immediately, sometimes in severe cases you may need fluid drained from around your knee.

In the early stages of this strain you should use the RICE method and avoid applying heat, drinking alcohol or attempting to massage the area.

Physiotherapy may be required to rehabilitate more severe knee ligament injuries and depending which ligament you pull or how many of them, surgery can also be needed.

That's why it's very important to pay a visit to the doctor.

Recovery time for these ligaments can vary depending on severity and which ligament you have injured.

After surgery on your Anterior Cruciate Ligament it can take six months or more to recover fully and surgery to treat your Posterior Cruciate Ligament can take from nine months to one year to completely heal.

If you sprain your Medial Collateral Ligament it generally takes around three months to heal and a complete tear takes six to nine months.

Of all the strains this one has the potential to put you out of action for the longest time, which is why you should be very careful how much pressure you apply to the back of the knee during tricks.

Intercostals

Caused by twisting the upper body, overstretching and swinging your arm too far with a lot of force, the Intercostal strain is one of the most inconvenient and unbearable.

Our Intercostal muscles are found around our ribs. They support the rib cage and for that reason can be a nightmare to recover in the event of a strain.

A strain in this area is usually accompanied by very sharp and intense shooting pain and a more constant pain.

Pain will increase every time you move your upper body, twist, sneeze and in my case just a yawn was very painful in the early stages of this strain.

Constant pain should ease off a few days into this injury but it may take longer to feel comfortable using your muscles again, turning over in bed or using your arms to push downwards to stand up from a chair.

All things I've had the pleasure of experiencing over the last three weeks.

Some more intense strains can also cause swelling and bruising and it may feel painful to breathe.

In the early stages of this strain you should compress the ribs by wrapping them being careful not to tie yourself too tight. Switch between hot and cold ice packs each day, starting with ice of course on the first day of injury.

[Heat packs](#) are great for increasing blood flow to the area to speed up recovery while ice helps to keep swelling down, which is why it's a good idea to alternate them.

If you are breathing lightly to reduce pain you should do some deep breathing exercises, this may sound uncomfortable but short sharp breaths will reduce oxygen levels slowing down recover time and can also cause pneumonia.

Finally, try soaking in some [Epsom bath salts](#) to relieve muscle pain.

Intercostal strains take the least amount of time to heal for a severe strain at only around eight weeks. Two weeks recovery is enough for a very mild strain and three to four weeks should cover a moderate strain.

I'll keep my fingers crossed for next week, but I think this is going to be a six week job for me based on the severity of the strain.

Forearm

Most commonly caused by improper technique and a lack of engagement in the upper arm in split grips is Forearm pain.

Again this type of strain can be graded from one to three by your doctor, with one producing a mild ache, grade two causing sharp pains and loss of strength in the muscles and grade three being very severe and usually treated surgically.

The more severe grade of forearm strain is usually caused by repetitive strains on the muscle. Generally this strain is caused by muscle fatigue from repetitively using the forearms.

It is fine to [treat grade one and two strains at home](#) using compression to support and following the RICE method described above.

A grade one strain will take only a week to heal and grade two can take up to six weeks. A severe Forearm tear with surgical treatment can take up to twelve weeks to heal.

You can help to prevent this type of strain by putting less pressure on your forearms and [building strength in the muscle](#).

Wrists

Directly connected to our forearms and requiring just as much [attention to strengthening](#) are our wrists!

The wrists are made up of eight bones and a network of nerves and ligaments. This is where you'll find the Carpal Tunnel.

A [wrist compression for support](#) helps with recovery and we naturally sleep with our wrists in a bent position too, so [wearing a splint](#) can help to immobilise the muscles overnight.

Physiotherapy and gentle massage will help the recovery process of a wrist strain. Very light range of motion stretches can also help but you should see a doctor if the pain persists.

Wrist strain is caused by bending the wrists in abnormal positions, so [incorrect alignment in split grips](#) can be a common cause of this in pole dancing.

A mild wrist strain should only take two to three weeks to recover, with a more intense strain taking three to six months.

A grade three tear in the wrist can require surgical treatment which takes three or more months to heal.

Warning: You Must Be Patient & Rest Properly!

Now after reading all about how long to rest your varying ailments you may be wondering why there is a need for this section. Well, for some reason pole dancers just can't seem to quit.

You know you're injured but you just don't want to be apart from the love of your life for that long, the thought of it is more unbearable than working through the pain.

You know that you should be taking complete and total rest from pole during your recovery period, you will likely be unable to carry on in the event of a severe muscle tear.

For those of you who have only suffered a mild tear and think you can pole onwards and upwards, think again!

Not resting a mild strain will cause repeat mild traumas to your muscle which can result in (drum roll...) you got it, a more severe injury!

So if you've experienced any of the injuries above for prolonged periods much longer than I've written here or it just doesn't seem to heal, the likelihood is you didn't take enough time for recovery.

If you're sure that you have taken enough time to recover but your strain is not getting any better you should check out these [other reasons why your injury might not be healing](#) properly.

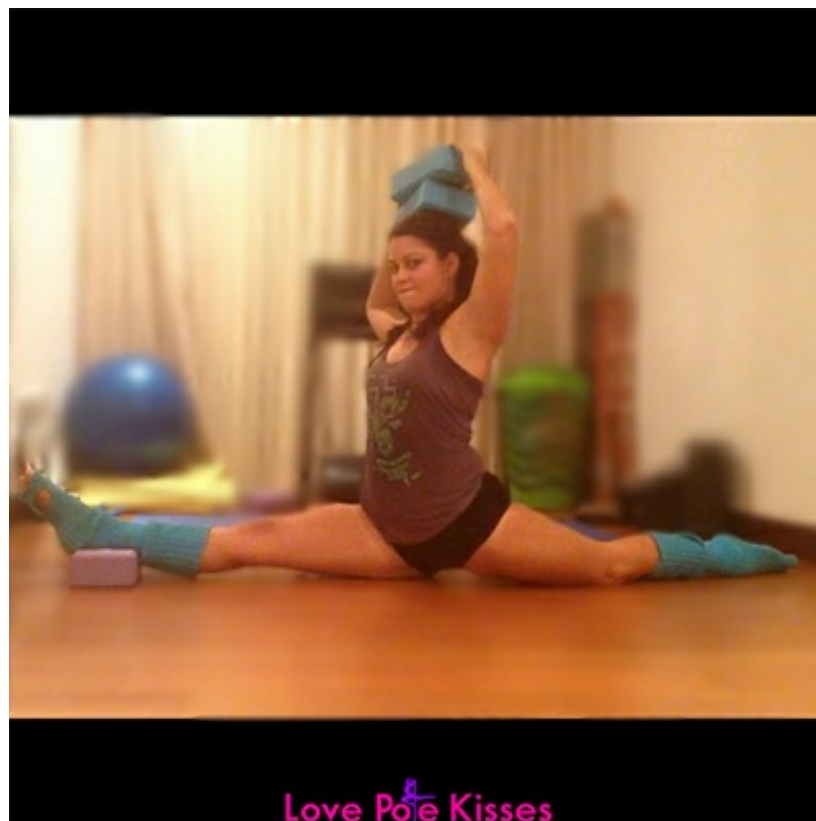
How To Keep Yourself Occupied In A Rest Period

This depends entirely on what you have injured, my intercostal injury prevents me from doing any upper body workout, twisting ab workouts etc, because those all pull on the intercostal muscles.

I had to wait a full two weeks before I could even jog a little to warm up my legs to train other areas while I heal.

So while the first couple of weeks can be a nightmare, you will eventually be able to focus on training other areas of your body while your injured muscles heal.

For me right now that means I've been training leg strength and flexibility, and I just touched down in my first one block oversplit this week!



Here are some other things you can do with your time off from the pole to keep yourself busy;

- Watch amazing [pole performance videos](#) for inspiration
- Read your favourite pole blogs for helpful hints and tips
- Plan ahead; create a rehabilitation plan and [set your future goals](#)

- Cross train uninjured areas

So if your hamstrings are injured, warm up those shoulders and get some push ups and pull ups under your belt. If your shoulders are injured work on squats, leg raises, ab work and flexibility for splits.

If you can't walk on your calves learn to walk on your hands...

Just kidding! Although handstands are a great cross training exercise for pole, it's better to save that for when you can safely land on your feet!

If you're stuck for ideas to keep you occupied drop me a comment, I may have a suggestion you could use 😊

Prevention Is The Best Cure

Most of these pole dancing muscle injuries can be prevented by building strength correctly and using proper techniques in your pole sessions.

You should also be warming up before you start, and before any intense stretching sessions. Warming up increases blood flow and flexibility in your muscles and reduces the risk of injury.

Another cause of muscle strain is working on flexibility with no attempt to strengthen your muscles. Strengthening as you stretch will not only reduce likelihood of injury but also speed up your progress.

Muscle strains in pole dancing can often happen very unexpectedly and are not always a result of repeat trauma.

They are also more common in cold weather because the muscles cool down faster and become more tense.

Here are some quick prevention techniques you can easily implement to avoid muscle strain in future...

Don't

- Don't put pressure on the back of the knee on the pole
- Don't stretch beyond your limit
- Don't hold static stretches for long periods of time
- Don't train when you are tired

Do

- Strengthen equally when stretching for flexibility
- Always remember to cool down
- Drink lots of water to keep muscles hydrated
- Always warm up before your pole or session
- Take extra time to warm up in cold weather
- Stop training for the day if you experience cramp
- Train both sides to prevent muscle imbalances!

This is probably one of the most common reasons for apparently 'unexplainable' injury in pole. The type of injuries where no one is sure quite where they went wrong.



A muscle imbalance is when one side of an opposing muscle group is very strong and the other a lot weaker. In these cases the weaker muscles are very easily injured, so always train both sides!

Final Thoughts

It's important to remember that you should consult your doctor in the event of any muscle injury and before taking any medication.

I'm not a doctor and the purpose of this post is to give caution, I see so many people injuring themselves and not resting properly that I was inspired to write on the subject.

With that said, the only person who can accurately diagnose your injuries and advise you on proper care is your GP.

The most important thing to take away from this article is prevention, do everything you can to prevent muscle injury.

In the event of a mishap please be patient and allow your body the proper time to rest.

Let me know if you have any (non-medical) questions in the comments! 😊