

Understanding Strains

What is a Strain?

A **strain** is a **stretching or tearing of a muscle or tendon** (the tissue that connects muscle to bone). Strains commonly occur in the **back, hamstrings, and shoulders** due to **overuse, improper lifting, or sudden movements**.

Signs & Symptoms of a Strain

- ✓ Pain and tenderness in the affected muscle
- ✓ Swelling or bruising
- ✓ Muscle weakness or spasms
- ✓ Difficulty moving the affected area
- ✓ A popping sensation at the time of injury (in severe cases)

Common Causes of Strains

Overuse or repetitive motion (sports, heavy lifting, prolonged standing)

Sudden movements (jumping, sprinting, or quick direction changes)

Lifting incorrectly (poor posture, twisting while lifting)

Insufficient warm-up before physical activity

Treatment: The R.I.C.E. Method

Rest - Avoid using the injured muscle for **24-48 hours**.

Ice - Apply an **ice pack for 15-20 minutes every 2-3 hours** for the first 48 hours.

Compression - Use an **elastic bandage** to reduce swelling (not too tight).

Elevation - Keep the injured area **elevated above heart level** if possible.

When to Seek Medical Help

Severe pain or inability to move the muscle

Swelling or bruising that worsens over time

Numbness or tingling in the affected area

A complete loss of muscle function (possible tendon rupture)

Preventing Strains

- ✓ **Warm up properly** before exercise or physical activity.
- ✓ **Stretch regularly** to maintain muscle flexibility.
- ✓ **Use proper lifting techniques** (bend at the knees, not the waist).
- ✓ **Strengthen muscles** to improve stability and prevent overuse injuries.
- ✓ **Take breaks** when performing repetitive movements.

Rehabilitation & Recovery

After **48 hours**, start **gentle stretching and movement** to prevent stiffness.

Gradually **increase activity levels** as pain decreases.

Strengthening exercises (as tolerated) help restore function and prevent re-injury.

Bottom Line

- ✓ **Follow R.I.C.E. treatment** immediately after a strain.
- ✓ **Start gentle movement after 48 hours** to aid recovery.
- ✓ **Prevent future strains with proper warm-ups, stretching, and strengthening.**
- ✓ **Seek medical attention for severe pain, swelling, or loss of function.**

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.