

“I PULLED MY GROIN”

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A groin strain is relatively common in sports that involve quick starts and cutting motions. Hockey players (especially goalies) are susceptible to groin strains because of the quick cutting and frequent change of direction while skating. Groin strains result from a sudden over-extension or extreme stretch to a muscle that has not been adequately warmed up prior to activity.

What is the groin?

The groin is not the name of a specific muscle. The word “groin” is derived from a latin word that refers to a group of muscles that serve as the junction between the abdomen and the thigh. Most people associate the groin area with the inside of their thigh.

There are actually six muscles that make up the inner compartment of the thigh. They are: pectineus, adductor longus, adductor brevis, adductor magnus, gracilis and obturator externus. See the anatomical diagram below (*Figure 1*). Most of these muscles function to lift the thigh up (a movement of the hip called flexion) or to pull the thigh across the body (hip adduction).

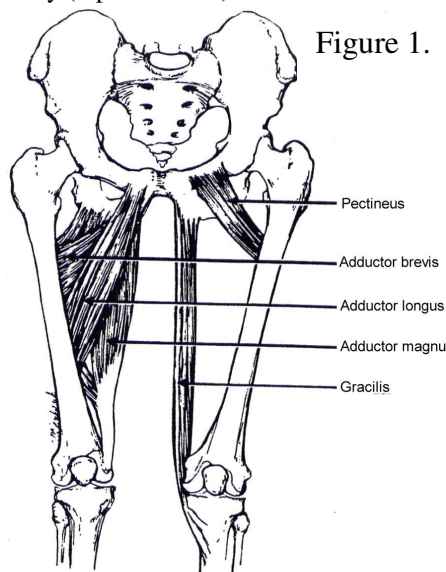


Figure 1.

How can you avoid a groin injury?

Proper stretching is essential in developing or maintaining an adequate length to the adductor muscles. Muscles that are tight or not warmed up properly are at greater risk of being strained when

they are subjected to a sudden stretch or sudden movement. To reduce the risk of muscle strains, stretching should be performed when the muscles are warm (for example, after a short run, skate, bike ride etc.). Each stretch should be held for a minimum of 30 seconds and repeated three to five times each. See the groin stretches illustrated below.

What should I do if I strain my groin?

When the groin muscles have been strained, the body will respond by initiating an inflammatory process at the area of injury. As a result, the area may become red and swollen, with some degree of pain. The inflammatory response is the first stage of healing. The amount of inflammation will vary and is dependent on the degree of damage to the muscle(s). Ice should be applied as soon as possible to the injured area (at least for the first 72 hours after the injury) and should not be left on for longer than 15 minutes. Ice can be reapplied at half hour intervals. Compression is also helpful to reduce the inflammation. A hip spica (a strap that wraps around the hip) or compression shorts are commonly prescribed in order to reduce the strain on the muscle(s).

Your family physician or a sports medicine physician may recommend the use of over-the-counter or prescription anti-inflammatories in order to reduce the inflammation in the muscle.

Physiotherapy may be beneficial in reducing the pain and inflammation and returning you to your sport as soon as possible. Physiotherapists can advise you on correct stretches to perform and when stretches are appropriate in the rehabilitative process. Ultrasound and electrotherapy may be used, as well as hands-on techniques to return the

muscles to their pre-injury function. Acupuncture may also be helpful in relieving pain and accelerating your progress.

How long does it take to recover from a groin strain?

Normal healing of a muscle will occur in three to six weeks as long as you do not reagravate the muscle. Unfortunately, many athletes who have a mild groin strain will tend to continue participation in their sport which worsens their prognosis (twelve weeks instead of the three to six weeks listed above). The muscles need time to recover and to heal. It is imperative that muscles be adequately strengthened prior to resuming vigorous activities such as hockey. Your physiotherapist can advise you on specific strengthening exercises given the nature of your sport. They can also advise you on the appropriate time to return to sport without risk of reagravating the injury. As aforementioned, a hip spica or compression shorts may allow you to return to sport sooner by adding extra support and creating compression to the groin muscles.

The following stretches (*Figure 2*) are basic groin muscle stretches. It is advisable to consult a professional for an individualized stretching and strengthening program that is specific to your sport.

Figure 2 – Groin Stretches

