

BUMPS & BRUISES?

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So what is a charleyhorse? Although many people assume any pain in the thigh is a charleyhorse, this term generally refers to a deep contusion (bruising) of the muscle. Contusions involve direct contact to the muscle which results in damage to the cells and blood vessels within the muscle. This injury is different from a muscle strain which generally refers to a "pulled" muscle and is not an injury from direct contact.

Muscle contusions can occur from direct contact with anything on the ice... sticks, net posts, boards, puck and other players. The most common location is the thigh quadriceps group of muscles. These muscles are at the front of the thigh and, when contracted, cause the knee to straighten. Common mechanisms include low hip checks and getting "knee-ed" by another player.

With a contusion, bleeding that occurs in the muscle can collect in the form of a hematoma (like a large blood-filled cyst). Sometimes, the bleeding can track to the surface and show up under the skin. The bleeding and swelling can take up space and cause the whole muscle to feel tight.

Thigh contusions occur in varying severities. Mild contusions only involve minimal bleeding and muscle injury. The injured player usually is able to continue playing and may only notice the pain after the game. Moderate contusions often cause a significant limp and the player usually has difficulty bending the knee (by bending the knee, the injured quadriceps muscles are stretched which causes pain). A With severe contusions, there is considerable disability. The player

often can not bear any weight on the injured leg and has great difficulty bending the knee. There will often be a lot of tightness in the thigh.

People often do not give muscle contusions enough "respect". That is, they say "it's just a bruise... I can play with a bruise". This is often not the case. If the muscle is not given a chance to heal, then a calcium deposits can form in the muscle hematoma. This condition is called "myositis ossificans". Cam Neely, who used to play for the Boston Bruins, missed a large part of a season because of this complication. Recurrent injury can cause re-bleeding which increases the chance of myositis ossificans. Also, if there is an enormous amount of bleeding, then the pressure build-up within the muscle compartment can lead to severe tissue damage. This condition is called acute compartment syndrome.

What should you do if you get injured with a muscle contusion? All recent contusions should be treated with ice, approximately 15 mins. per hour for the first 24-48 hours. Although "every hour" is very difficult to achieve, you should ice as frequently as you can. Compression is very important. Compress with a elastic tensor bandage, using a foam padding beneath the tensor where the contusion is to add to the compression effect. The compression should be firm but not too tight or else you will get numbness and swelling in your foot (not a good thing!). The compression and icing help to stop the bleeding.

Whatever you do, do NOT apply heat in the early phases of injury

since heat can actually increase the bleeding and worsen the injury. Also, do not use anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) and aspirin which can thin the blood and also increase the bleeding.

For mild contusions, if you do not have any pain in walking, running or jumping, and you have full strength and range of motion of your knee, then you probably do not need any further treatment. If, however, you have a worse injury and you are limping, you should be assessed by a sport physician. If you have a noticeable limp, crutches should be used until there is no pain walking. A physiotherapist or athletic therapist can be helpful in regaining the knee range of motion and regaining strength in the quadriceps. Deciding on when to safely return to playing hockey can be a little tricky. Re-bleeding is common a week after the initial injury. Moderate and severe thigh hematoma can often take weeks to heal. Special "doughnut" padding should be used to help prevent re-injury.

Remember, a charley horse can be a serious injury. Treat it with respect!

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