



ACUTE BACK PAIN CAUSED BY JOINT SPRAINS

This is a very common condition treated by Osteopaths on a daily basis. It can happen at any joint, but commonly happens in the neck, middle and low back and rib areas.

Joint sprains vary in severity from very mild to excruciating pain.

Symptoms of acute joint sprains

- Acute pain – comes on over a short period of time (a day or overnight) can be intense.
- Sharp pain with movement – like a little knife, pinch or spasm
- Specific movements irritate particular joints. Bad sprains are irritated by all movements
- Spasm and contraction of surrounding muscles
- Breathing, cough, sneeze can cause intense pain especially if rib joints are sprained.
- Usually the pain is worse on one side
- Your posture may change as your body tries to move your weight off the area or joints – especially if they are in your lower back

How do they happen?

- Tension builds up over time due to postural strain, poor flexibility, inactivity,

poorly executed exercise, unusual increased activity, “wear and tear” or a combination of issues.

- An “incident” that causes the sprain can often involve bending, lifting or twisting. Sometimes the incident may not be that significant at the time and people often wake the next day with the onset of the symptoms. Eg: waking with a rye neck after a weekend of painting.

What happens in a joint sprain

- The affected joint/s and the capsule around the joint/s become inflamed and irritated
- The inflammation irritates ligaments.
- Inflammation collects in the joint space, which causes acute pain especially if you try to do movements involving this joint, or put pressure or increased weight

through the joint.

- The inflammation of the joint will cause surrounding muscles to spasm to protect the area – causing further pain and limitation to movement.

The good news

- Most of the time there is no major long lasting damage to the joints, muscles or any nerves and they can usually recover and heal well.

The bad news

- They can be very painful and make it very hard for you to move which can be scary
- Depending on the severity can cause sharp pain for 2 – 10 days and then ongoing stiffness in the area
- Once you have sprained a joint/s you will probably have re-occurring episodes if you do not attend to the contributing factors and the muscle spasm that has occurred

What to do

- Seek professional advice – See your Osteopath so they can diagnose the condition properly and make sure this is what has happened especially if there has been any trauma or falls etc as you may require further investigations. Some other back complaints can also present in a similar manner but require different treatment, only a professional will be able to assess and diagnose this for you properly.
- Treatment – evidence suggests treatment

aimed at gently restoring the range of motion to the joints and controlling muscle spasm can be effective

- Your osteopath can guide you on taking measures to reduce contributing factors such as poor posture, chronic muscular tension, poor sports technique, poor or incorrect lifting, poor desk/office set up etc
- Your osteopath will show you specific stretches or movements which can help to get to better quickly and avoid re-irritation
- Take measures to reduce and control inflammation, such as ice, natural and pharmaceutical anti-inflammatory medications (these should only be prescribed by a health professional)

What not to do

- Try to diagnose or treat it yourself.
- Put heat on it – this may temporarily make muscles feel good – but you will only contribute to the inflammation going on.
- Try to stretch it out or do exercises or stretches that have been prescribed to someone else as their condition may not be exactly the same or involve the same joints. Incorrect stretches and exercises can actually make the situation far worse.
- Go to bed or lie on the couch and not move – this will often only cause more stiffness, gentle and safe movement in cases where there has been no trauma is beneficial.