

SPORTS

Steps athletes can take to live pain free

For many people, living with pain has become a common and acceptable part of life. While some may even blame it on old age, they couldn't be more wrong. Understanding pain is the first step to eliminating it.

To fully understand pain, first people need to understand how their muscles work and play a very big role in one's overall health. It's the stretching and contracting of the muscles that allow us to move. The muscles are attached on either end to bones and without them the body would crumble to the floor. It's crucial that muscles be balanced in order to live pain-free. Two common examples of this is the balance of the quadriceps muscles (front of thigh) and the hamstring muscles (back of thigh); or the balance between the lower back and the abdominal muscles. That's why so many people recommend strengthening the abs for those who suffer from back pain.

When two or more muscles are not equal, there is a muscle imbalance. Imbalances occur in every part of the

body when two or more muscles that oppose each other are not equal. So very often it is tight and weak muscles that are actually the root cause of pain symptoms. So what causes muscle imbalances? There are many reasons for those tight and weak muscles or muscle imbalances, such as:

- Stress, anxiety, and constant worry
- Poor posture, nervous tension, trauma
- Strenuous activity, car accidents, pregnancy
- Sudden falls, sports injuries, running, lengthy tennis matches, aerobics, long walks on a soft sandy beach, leaning weight on only one leg for a long period of time and so much more.

Think of the body as a marionette and muscles as the strings. If one of the strings pulls more than the other, things won't be even. It's this inequality that eventually results in pain.

Everyday, life sets us up for numerous muscle imbalances. There are muscles that get overworked and too

tight, and there are muscles that get neglected and too weak. Even a simple thing like sitting for long periods of time tightens the quadriceps and the muscles in the back of the legs because they are in a shortened position while sitting.

Muscle imbalances can exist in every part of the body. Back, neck, shoulder, headache, and hand and wrist pain are just a few of the common conditions muscle imbalances create.

To effectively treat pain, I recommend a three-step approach

- Identify and eliminate the tight muscles
- Restore muscle flexibility
- Rebuild or strengthen the muscle

Following this approach is extremely effective in lengthening, stretching and balancing muscles, so that pain is eliminated. Based on the principle "lengthen before you strengthen," these three powerful techniques are proven to be successful in the treatment and maintenance of a pain-free lifestyle. But the true strength behind these three techniques lies really in the order in which they are done. Although stretching and exercise is typically recommended, if muscle spasms have not effectively been released, people can virtually do more damage than good. So release, lengthen, and then strengthen.

The second step of "lengthening" or stretching makes sure that muscles maintain their proper length and balance. Muscles that are too tight or pull too much, must be stretched. Finally, strengthening the area builds a new

foundation of support.

It's very important when strengthening to perform the exercises and stretches that are best suited to each individual and their specific situation. While "lengthen before you strengthen" is the fundamental concept, here are a few additional suggestions as well:

- Learn how muscles work. When people understand how something works, they are much more likely to figure out how to fix it.

- Learn what is causing the problem and how to treat it. Rely on the help of a qualified professional. Determining each individual's strength, flexibility, and muscle balance can easily be done to discover which muscles are tight and out of balance.

- Spend five minutes every day stretching. In order to correct or improve the condition of a muscle imbalance, lengthen tight muscles or get them to release a little.

- Perform some form of corrective exercise training. This doesn't mean to follow Arnold Schwarzenegger's body building program. Simply strengthen the weak muscles with some form of resistance training.

- Drink water. A well-hydrated body functions better in every way: one is less likely to have muscle cramps, the body recovers quicker, the immune system is stronger, and muscles and joints function better.

(submitted by Michael Greenspan, a certified neuromuscular therapist and owner of Massage Revolution in Manhattan Beach)

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Hockey dreams

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stantly changing because of call-ups.

Salcido finished the season with seven

goals and 20 assists for 27 points in 76 games. He was second in points among all defensemen on the team.

He did not even follow the Ducks much during the season although it was not hard to catch the scores. He was happy the team was doing well. He turned his attention to the Ducks once the playoffs rolled around.

"A lot of those guys who were on that team were on our team the year before so to see those guys do good and see the team do well it was pretty cool to see on the news and see on the television, ESPN and stuff like that."

Overall, his first year of experience playing at the professional level could not have gone much better for him and his parents.

"We're really, really proud of Brian and how he adjusted," said his dad. "It was a very, very difficult decision for him to make to leave college a year early and leave all his buddies and take the next step, but in the end I think he realized it was the logical move to make in order to pursue his dream."

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