

'No pain, no gain' is a phrase you hear all the time in the gym. However, it's important to distinguish between the pain associated with genuine effort, and the pain of a joint or muscle injury.

For example, many people notice a burning sensation in their muscles when they train. Completing your set despite this pain generally leads to greater gains in muscle size and strength. Muscle soreness 24-48 hours after exercise is caused by a small amount of damage to the muscle fibre itself. This is quite normal and desirable for many people, as it's the indication of a good training session. However, you should always avoid training a muscle that is still sore from the previous session, as it means it has not recovered properly afterwards. The pain of injury includes muscle strains (damage to the muscle itself), and joint sprains (damage to the tendon or ligaments). Over time, you will learn to recognise the difference between different types of pain. If you're in any doubt over whether you have an injury, then seek the advice of an expert in the field (such as a physiotherapist).

It's easy to ignore the first signs of shoulder problems in the belief you can "work through" or "loosen up" the tightness or pain. This is a mistake. When a shoulder injury is ignored, it quickly becomes a source of long-term problems. The causes of shoulder pain aren't always obvious. But the symptoms are. You'll feel pain due to impingement when your arms are raised upwards and outwards. In some cases, the pain takes on a "nagging" quality and is often troublesome at night. According to some, exercises such as the overhead press and lat pulldown performed behind the neck are the real causes of shoulder pain. However, swimmer's shoulder (also called impingement syndrome) - which is one of the most common causes of shoulder pain - usually occurs when some kind of problem already exists in the shoulder joint or shoulder girdle. It isn't the exercise that causes the shoulder impingement. Rather, a pre-existing condition is made worse by the exercise. One of the causes of shoulder pain is a faulty training program that ignores one or more of the muscles in the shoulder girdle or shoulder joint. Over time, some muscles become stronger than others. These imbalances make it more likely that you'll suffer from some form of shoulder pain.

Of course, the best way to avoid shoulder pain is to make sure your training program includes exercises for all of the muscles that create movement at the shoulder. Pressing exercises, for example, such as the bench press or overhead press should be balanced with an equal number of rowing exercises. Don't make the mistake of neglecting muscles in your back just because you can't see them. One alternative is to use a dumbbell rather than a barbell or machine for overhead pressing movements. Dumbbells allow complete freedom of movement so you can perform movements in a groove that's right for you. The lat pulldown can also be performed to the front, rather than behind the neck.

**I suffer from shoulder pain when I train my chest or shoulders. Is this normal?**

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