



Calf Muscle Strain/Tear

Sharp stabbing, tearing sensation in your calf whilst accelerating, jumping or running? You may have sustained a calf strain.

What is a calf strain/tear?

A calf strain is usually an acute injury where the muscle fibres in your calf are overstretched or torn resulting in a degree of damage to the muscle. This generally occurs in a sportsperson during acceleration, running, hopping or jumping movements or could be as simple as just taking a few quick steps. Calf strains can be graded depending on their severity.

Why does it happen?

Calf muscle strains occur when there is excessive force placed on the muscle group which results in damage to the muscle fibres. Some factors that may contribute to calf muscle strains include altered biomechanics, previous calf muscle injury, poor calf muscle flexibility, inadequate warm-up and poor foot mechanics.

What will a physiotherapist do?

The physiotherapist will determine the extent of your calf muscle injury, assess contributing factors and complete a biomechanical assessment. The physiotherapist will provide information in regards to the estimated time of recovery, appropriate rehabilitation methods and advice regarding RICE and no HARM principles.

The physiotherapist can employ treatments such as soft tissue therapy, dry needling, electrotherapy, ice or heat, compression garments, joint mobilisation, provide a home exercise program and advice regarding activity modification. They may also suggest the short term use of crutches and a heel lift.

Commencing an exercise program including calf range of movement, muscle strengthening and stretching is essential in the management of calf muscle injuries. The physiotherapist will develop an exercise program for you to complete which will involve gradual progressions before returning to sport.

What about sport?

It is important that before returning to sport a thorough rehabilitation process has been undertaken to avoid re-injury. This will involve graduated strengthening exercises throughout the rehabilitation stage. Guideline of days before return to sport with calf strains is as follows;

- Strain or minor muscle tear: 2-3 weeks
- Medium to large tear: 4 - 8 weeks
- Complete rupture: 12+ weeks

Outcome

Calf strains usually have a good recovery if appropriate rehabilitation is undertaken. Patients may be at greater risk of re-injury secondary to scar tissue formation and inadequate recovery.