Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Load Management

Patient Information Leaflet

MSK Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy Service

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www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

Load and Tissue Capacity

Load is the amount of force or physical stress we put on our body's tissues. Our tissues include muscles, tendons, joints and ligaments.

Your tissues need to be strong enough to cope with the load you put on them. This is called tissue capacity.

If your tissues are healthy, strong and used to certain activities, they can cope well.

If the load is more than your tissues can handle, you are more likely to get pain or an injury.

Sometimes, pain happens after a sudden event, like a fall. However, pain often builds up slowly because of changes in how much load we put on our body.

Some of these factors are

- how long we do an activity for
- how fast we do something
- how much weight is involved
- how often we do an activity

If you suddenly do more than your body is used to, or start something new, your tissues may become overloaded. This can cause pain.

An Example

You may be used to occasional walking or gardening. When spring arrives, and the weather improves you spend much more time doing those activities. Your tissues are not ready for this extra load, so they become irritated and painful. This is your body's way of telling you that the tissues don't have the capacity to cope and need more time to build capacity.

Increasing Tissue Capacity

The good news is that your pain can improve, by increasing the capacity of your tissues.

We do this by gradually exposing your tissues to load.

This allows:

- muscles to become stronger
- tendons to become more resilient
- bone density to increase

As your tissues adapt, your body will be able to tolerate more load before pain or injury occurs.

Tissue capacity is specific to the type of load that we put on them. It is therefore helpful to load your body in different ways, so it has the capacity to cope with a variety of activities.

Reducing Tissue Capacity

Reducing the load temporarily by resting may reduce pain at the time, however the capacity of our tissues will also reduce.

Instead of resting, it may be helpful at first if you try:

- reducing the weight
- reducing the speed
- reducing the duration
- reducing how often you do the activity or exercise

Other Factors to Consider

Your tissues are also affected by factors such as:

- your general health and fitness
- sleep
- mental health (such as stress and anxiety)

Regular physical activity, including strengthening exercises, helps build up your tissues capacity over time. Looking after your mental well-being, getting enough sleep, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and managing your weight can all help your body cope better with daily demands.

Remember

- Loading tissues beyond their capacity can lead to pain or injury
- Sleep, stress and your general health all affect your tissue capacity
- Prolonged rest is unhelpful, as this will cause your tissue capacity to reduce
- Your body adapts slowly. Building capacity usually takes between 6-12 weeks
- By managing load well, you can reduce pain, recover better and help prevent future injuries

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If you need help to understand this leaflet or would like it in a different language or format such as large print, Braille or audio, please ask a member of staff.

MSK Physiotherapy Service

Find out more about the MSK Physiotherapy Service and what we offer www.leicspart.nhs.uk/service/musculoskeletal-msk-therapy-physiotherapy/

Further Resources

Access our other MSK Physiotherapy resources www.leicspart.nhs.uk/msk-physiotherapy-resources-getting-started/

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