

Common Injuries in Bodybuilding

There is nothing that can slow you down like an injury. Sometimes it seems just when you are starting to make progress in your workouts, you suffer a nagging injury that takes all the fun out of exercising. Body builders have to educate themselves on some of the common injuries involved in the sport, and prepare smart training routines to prevent these setbacks from occurring.

When studying common injuries of bodybuilders, you can cover a wide variety. While most injuries are simple muscle strain, several serious injuries can occur when using improper training principles. Injuries can include joint sprains, hernia, Intervertebral disc herniation, bursitis, tendonitis, and ligament tears as well as acceleration of wear and tear on the joints or arthritis.

Before going in to some of the specific injuries commonly suffered with bodybuilding, I want to discuss some basic principles of injury free exercise. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" should be the rule of every bodybuilder. First, before you even think about going to the gym, try to assess your current physical and mental state. Are you tired? Did you eat? Are you mentally prepared for your training session? Unnecessary gym accidents and injuries happen because people are either tired or hungry or their mind is not in the exercise. You must try to be focused on the task at hand and be conscious of your movements. Also, did you get a good warm-up? Another common, easy to solve problem is that sometimes bodybuilders are so focused and psyched that they don't take the time to properly warm-up. By doing a proper warm-up, you will prepare the muscles and joints by increasing overall blood flow, oxygen, lubrication, elasticity, and ability to produce force across the joint. I bet if everyone performed a warm-up before they trained over one half of the injuries would be prevented. Thirdly, the principle of muscle balance and symmetry is of utmost importance when trying to prevent injury. You must realize that when you have strong muscles on one side of a joint, and weak muscles on the other, the chances of injuring yourself when training are greatly increased. Most of us have a muscle imbalance of one form or another. It is your job to find the weak points and spend extra time and energy training those weak points into your strong points. This may mean performing all those exercises that you usually avoid doing. It is also important to make sure you drink enough water before, during, and after your workouts. Just a little dehydration can cut muscle performance levels dramatically, which in turn can contribute to injury. And make sure you maintain a good air exchange at all times. This is best accomplished by exhaling whenever you are doing the positive movement and inhaling during the negative portion. Finally, listen to your body. A little delayed onset muscle soreness is to be expected with training, but if you are so sore that you can hardly move you might be overdoing it. Make sure that the muscle is well rested and properly warmed up before you train it again. These are all basic principles that if followed will greatly reduce your odds of injury.

However, sometimes you can't escape and injuries catch up on you. The following is a list of but a few of the most common injuries in bodybuilding and some helpful hints on how to best manage them.

1. Strain/ Sprain- Remember, muscles get strained and joints get sprained. Muscle strains can occur during a single violent episode or repetitive motions. With bodybuilding, most cases of muscle strain are from overloading or overstretching the muscle. When you do this you take the muscle fibers past their anatomical limit and micro tears in the muscle fibers can occur. In most cases, muscle strain is mild with no appreciable tearing. This would result in pain and discomfort with movement and subsequent muscle spasm. In more severe cases with actual tearing of fibers, the symptoms are more severe and there is swelling and limitation of movement. Joint sprains are a little more serious and usually have accompanying muscle strains to boot. During a sprain, there is damage at the level of the joint itself and usually joint capsule, ligament and/or tendon disruption. Sprains are characterized by swelling and limitation of movement as well as bruising and loss of joint function. If the force on the ligaments, tendons, or capsule is too great, a small

piece of bone can be pulled off at their attachment sites. This is called an avulsion fracture and should be treated as a severe sprain. The treatment for strains and sprains are a little different. With muscle strain, you should first rest the area to promote healing. This rest should only be about 1-2 days and then you should begin to work the muscle through basic range of motion exercises. Once a full, pain free range of motion can be achieved, gradual loading of the muscle can resume. When rehabilitating the injured area remember to warm up and start at a low level of intensity and gradually progress until full function is achieved. Joint sprains take a little longer to heal completely. Ligaments, tendons and joint capsule structures do not receive a abundant blood supply like muscle. So healing takes longer. Also, if these connective tissue structures have been stretched, you can run into the problem of chronic joint instability unless you rehabilitate the joint properly. The first step in treating sprains is rest, ice, compression and elevation. This should be strictly adhered to the first 48 hours at least. After this time, begin to try to move the joint through a range of motion slowly and without too much pain. Joint motion will no doubt be limited, but try to work at restoring as much motion into the joint as possible. Not only will this increase circulation to the region, but will help the scar tissue formation to be laid down along the lines of normal movement. Begin to weight bear as soon as you feel fit, and try to slowly work the joint back to normal. If pain or swelling is excessive or increased with your rehabilitation, you are probably trying too hard. If the connective tissue of the joint was damaged or stretched during the injury, the joint itself will be unstable and very susceptible to further injury. To prevent a chronic condition, try to provide stability and tighten up the joint by strengthening and balancing the surrounding muscle. If the ligaments were stretched, it can take over a year for them to creep back to normal length. By developing balanced muscles around the joint, you can provide much needed stability.

2. Hernia and Intervertebral disc herniation- Both of these injuries can occur due to improper breathing techniques. In bodybuilding, certain exercises have a tendency to build up your internal pressure. If you try to exert yourself really hard and not breath properly, the pressure can build up inside you to a point where something is going to give. Hernias usually occur in the lower abdominal wall, inguinal, or testicular regions. Depending on the size of the hernia, surgical repair may be warranted. If you suspect a hernia, see your physician. Intervertebral disc herniations can occur anywhere along the spinal column. In some cases, disc material can seep out into the spinal canal and cause nerve interference. This can be characterized by radiating pain, numbness and tingling sensations, weakness and altered skin sensations. In almost all cases, disc herniations will alter the normal spinal mechanics and increase degeneration and pain. If you suspect a Intervertebral disc herniation seek conservative care by a chiropractor always before entertaining the idea of surgical intervention.

3. Tendonitis and Bursitis- Whenever you see the suffix, "itis" you know your talking inflammation. Tendonitis and bursitis, or inflammation of the tendon or bursae, occurs primarily with repetitive motions and usually involves some sort of muscle imbalance. A common example of tendonitis is "tennis elbow." In this case, the forearm muscles that flex the wrist overpower the weaker wrist extensor muscles. This causes overuse of the extensor tendons and precipitates swelling within the sheath that surrounds the tendon. Treatment should be similar to that of muscle strain, with initial rest, ice, compression and elevation. Eventually work the injured tendon back and focus your rehabilitation on strengthening the injured muscle especially in the eccentric phase of muscle contraction. Over the counter anti-inflammatories can help, but should only be used if absolutely necessary. Bursitis usually develops due to unequal movements and forces within the joint. This causes a irritation to the bursae, which is cushion- like material in the joint complex that allows for smoothness of movement. If a muscle imbalance exists, proper joint mechanics will not be maintained and irritation to the bursae can occur. Treatment should be similar to tendonitis with a extra emphasis placed on joint motion and muscle balance.

Here is just a few of the common injuries in bodybuilding. By sticking to the basic principles of focus, warm-up, muscle balance, hydration and breathing, many injuries can be prevented before they happen. If you do get injured, listen to your body and don't try to come back to fast

or you can injure yourself worse. If you suspect a bodybuilding injury that might be serious, seek the advice of a professional that deals in functional rehabilitation of sports injuries. Once enrolled in a comprehensive rehabilitation program you will be on your way back to the top!

Dr. Bernie Sengstock is a licensed Chiropractor working towards his Diplomat in Chiropractic Rehabilitation. He is currently based at Spinecare/ American Comprehensive Medical P.C. which combines chiropractic, medical and physical therapy under one roof. A full line of rehabilitation equipment is available and nutritional counseling offered. For a free consultation and examination please call (516) 277-0060.

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