



# When to stop training and when to work through

*By Dawn Nunes, head of rehab and physiotherapist,*

*Pure Sports Medicine*



## Here I explain the difference between recognising pain and stopping, and when you need to push through to gain results.

Pain is experienced differently for each person but there are some basic guidelines we can use to help us understand and recognise it better. This will help us to distinguish whether it is pain that may harm or pain that may be a result of a hard workout and, after a period, will settle.

We know our bodies and when something doesn't feel quite right. It is important to listen to your body and, if you are tired, fatigued and stressed, not to push it further as it is more vulnerable to injury.

If you are working out and you experience a sudden sharp, shooting pain – especially after or during a particular movement – stop immediately. Even if it feels OK soon afterwards, do not exercise that muscle/joint further to see how it responds. Some injuries can be quite severe, but the pain can come on at a later stage as it may be inflammatory in nature and, by stopping immediately, you give it the best chance to recover better by not injuring the area further.

If 24 hours has passed and the pain has completely subsided, gently start exercising the area but reduce the weight through it and leave plyometric (jumping-type) movements for a later stage, as these are high-impact exercises. Gradually load the area more over the next few days – ideally, leaving a day's rest in between.

With a gradual onset of pain related to a specific activity, this is usually longer term in nature. Often, we can experience an irritation pain, which we can still exercise through – it doesn't stop us – but we do not feel completely comfortable. This type of pain needs to be addressed as soon as you notice it, as the longer that you have the pain, often the longer it can take to heal. Try to reduce your activity for a few days – but don't stop completely – and see if anything changes when you return to the activity. If it has not settled, seek medical help from a physiotherapist, who will do a thorough assessment to determine the most likely cause as well as how to fully rehabilitate it.

**We often see a pattern when people get injured. If we try to push our body beyond what it can do, it will result in injury. This can vary depending on a few factors. The following factors may be contributing to a possible injury:**

- Increased stress
- Working long hours leading to mental and physical fatigue
- Sleeping under six hours on average, restless sleep or inconsistent sleep
- Poor nutrition and hydration
- Sudden increase in load of exercise. This can come in many forms, such as increased number of sessions | per week, increased weight load, repetitions, sets, decreased rest breaks, training the same muscle group repetitively or longer training sessions; these variables in themselves are not bad but, if suddenly increased – especially in more than one variable – it can contribute to an overload, which may lead to injury
- A new sport/activity suddenly introduced in a large quantity or in a competitive manner
- Not enough rest days/time periods
- New equipment – such as running shoes – which are vastly different from before, used over a long activity for the first time

**It is important to note that some pain should not be ignored. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your physiotherapist/sports doctor immediately:**

- Night pain that wakes you up from your sleep
- Pain that worsens when you are not doing any activity, which doesn't make sense
- Worsening pain that affects your daily activities for prolonged periods – like walking, getting ready for the day, sitting or transitional movements like sit to stand
- Neural-type pain, including pins and needles, numbness or sharp, shooting pain
- Any change in bowel or bladder function
- Neural pain down both legs or both arms
- Any pain that makes you feel sick and/or dizzy, or continual headaches
- Pain that you are unsure of; if in doubt, contact a health professional

Loading our bodies is needed to grow and develop results but this needs to be done in a consistent and gradual manner. Too much and too soon can often result in an unwanted niggle or injury and will delay your training and possibly even result in pain and lost training days.

It is all about balance and listening to your body. Some days we will feel better than others and we can push more than we expected, but other days our bodies may feel more fatigued and tired, and we may need to adjust and adapt our training. We will grow stronger by listening to our bodies more often and learning what works well for them, rather than always pushing through until it hurts or until you collapse. In short, have some good-quality, hard workout days in between your other workouts. Variety is key – our bodies love to move in different ways and this continual adaptive challenge will force our bodies to grow stronger and quicker as they learn to adapt.

*fitpro*