

squash physio

Groin strain 1

THE EFFECTS OF GROIN STRAIN ON SQUASH PLAYERS CAN RANGE FROM ANNOYING TO DEBILITATING. IT CAN RESULT FROM A 'PULLED MUSCLE' BUT THIS IS NOT ALWAYS THE CASE, EXPLAINS PHIL NEWTON.



PHILIP NEWTON is Clinical Director of the Lilleshall Sports Injury Rehab Centre. He specialises in injury rehabilitation, dealing with a wide range of sportspeople. Philip has been part of the England Squash elite squad support team since 1998.

The problem with groin pain is that it is all too often diagnosed incorrectly. This can lead to inappropriate treatment and continuing problems.

The groin is a part of the body where many important structures can cause pain. Coming up with an accurate diagnosis for the pain is a vital first step in getting the problem sorted out. There is a big list of conditions that can give rise to groin pain and simply listing them here will probably worry you unnecessarily and will not enlighten you to any meaningful degree. Suffice to say that the way that medics approach this diagnostically challenging area is by a process of elimination.

Whilst muscle and tendon injuries account for a high proportion of groin problems, there are plenty of other things that can give rise to long-standing and recurrent groin pain.

This is particularly the case with groin pain that seems to come and go of its own accord or is triggered by seemingly trivial movements or activities. Let's take a look at a couple of relatively common causes of problematic groin pain and then go on to discuss how best to get the problem sorted out.

SPORTS HERNIA

What is it?

This is an often-overlooked cause of groin pain in sportspeople. We are not talking here about a true hernia, which manifests itself as a lump in the lower belly and causes pain when you are lifting or straining. A true hernia is a tear or defect in the abdominal wall that is big enough for the abdominal contents to bulge through. The groin crease is the most common area for a true hernia and in this region it is referred to as an 'inguinal hernia'.

A 'sports hernia', as it is sometimes called, isn't a true hernia and there is no bulge in the abdominal wall. Instead there is a weakening of the deep part of the lower abdominal soft tissues adjacent to the front of the pelvis.

How do you know you have one?

A telltale sign of the presence of a

sports hernia is the fact that coughing and sneezing often causes quite sharp lower abdominal and/or groin pain.

There are no clear-cut clinical tests to check whether or not a sports hernia is present. However, the presence of a dilated superficial inguinal ring could indicate that one is present. (If you are wondering where the superficial inguinal ring is, suffice it to say that a doctor feels for it with his little finger via the scrotum!)

This snippet of information has probably led you to deduce that sports hernias are not at all common in women. This is because in men, the spermatic cord exits the abdomen in this region and consequently this part of the abdominal wall is relatively weak.

Repairing the damage

The only answer to groin pain that is related to a sports hernia and has not responded to physiotherapy is to have the defect surgically repaired. This is a very common procedure in many sports, particularly in football and rugby. The recovery rates are excellent and the time taken to return to sport is usually just a few weeks.

STIFF HIP

Hip stiffness is often mistaken for a pulled muscle

Stiffness of the hip is a very common cause of groin pain, which is frequently felt deep in the crease of the groin. Sometimes the degree of hip restriction is small and in the majority of cases the solution is simple – stretch the hip out and the pain goes away.

The best way to do this is to see a physiotherapist, who after determining which combination of hip movements need to be improved can perform carefully directed 'passive stretches' on the hip. This process is often uncomfortable, but the discomfort soon

eases as hip flexibility is restored.

Stretching

This approach often seems counter-intuitive to the groin pain sufferer. After all, we are programmed to avoid painful situations and body positions. However, in the case of chronic and long-standing groin pain that is caused by a stiff hip, the best way forward is with firmly applied stretches – particularly if they cause pain. However, it is best to get the help and advice of a physio before performing pain-provoking stretches.

GETTING GROIN PAIN SORTED

Sportspeople don't only suffer from sports injuries

If you have long-standing groin pain or severe groin pain that is interfering with your sport or daily life, your first port of call should be your GP. You might think it a waste of time going to a GP with a sports injury, but the important thing to remember is that sportspeople do have things wrong with them other than sports injuries.

The point of getting checked out by your GP first is to rule out the non-sport / orthopaedic causes of groin pain. Once this has been done, the next port of call should be a physiotherapist who has a sports medicine and orthopaedic specialisation. The physio will be able to check out the key areas associated with groin pain (the back, pelvis and hips) and advise accordingly on appropriate treatment.

SPORTS HERNIA

- Coughing and sneezing often causes pain.
- The problem usually comes on gradually.
- It rarely affects women

HIP STIFFNESS

- Hip stiffness is often mistaken for a 'pulled groin muscle'
- Regaining full hip mobility often clears the groin pain
- Always consult a physio when stretching causes pain

THREE STEPS TO DEALING WITH GROIN PAIN

- See your GP to rule out non-sport causes
- Consult a physiotherapist
- Follow a structured management and treatment plan

Next Issue:

In the next issue Philip will give some practical tips on how to minimise the risk of developing groin pain.

Disclaimer

This article is for general information only and should not be used as a basis for diagnosis or treatment.

