

From lying on a tennis ball to using bad language: How to roll away aches and pains

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Painkillers such as paracetamol are the first resort for aches and pains.

But recent research shows a third of us take more than the recommended dose, despite serious risks.

Yet there are drug-free ways of tackling minor pain — as experts tell ANNA HODGEKISS...

NECK AND BACK

A tennis ball is a great painkiller, says Dr Rick Seah, consultant in sport and exercise medicine at Pure Sports Medicine clinics in London.

'For backache, lie on the tennis ball and move it around under the painful area.

'For neck pain, stand against a wall, put the ball behind your neck and move the ball around the painful area for five to ten minutes.'

Applying pressure in this way works on the principle of myofascial releasing — it increases blood flow to the area and brings more oxygen and nutrients to aid repair.

It can also release endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

Door handles used in the same way are ideal for tackling middle back pain around the difficult-to-reach bra strap area, says Sammy Margo, of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.

Deep breathing can also help reduce pain.



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Breathing using the diaphragm offloads tension in the neck muscles

'Shallow breathing — perhaps through stress or poor posture — tenses the scalene muscles at the front of the neck,' says Tim Allardyce, of the British Osteopathic Association.

The muscles shorten and affect the posture, causing pain.

Breathing using the diaphragm — a layer of muscle across the bottom of the ribcage — offloads tension in the neck muscles, reducing pain.

Place one hand on your stomach and the other hand on your chest. Take a deep breath in and push your belly (and your hand) upwards. Make sure the hand on your chest does not move. Repeat ten times.



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For neck pain, stand against a wall, put the tennis ball behind your neck and move the ball around the painful area for five to ten minutes

THIGHS

Use a rolling pin to tackle thigh pain, says Sammy Margo.

'New shoes, increased intensity, frequency or duration of exercise or running on different surfaces can trigger iliotibial band syndrome — pain in the outside of the thigh.

'A rolling pin is the right shape and size for self-massage. Five minutes a day should help, or little and often.'

HANDS AND WRISTS

For arthritis in the hands, wrists and forearms, exercise can help, says Kate Llewellyn, of the charity Arthritis Care. It may be easier to do this in a bowl of warm water or after washing up if the stiffness is very bad.

Curl your fingers into a fist and stretch them out. Spread them into a wide span and then close again.

Open your hand and circle your thumbs. Stretch your thumb away from the palm of your hand as far as you can. Pull the thumb back to touch each fingertip of the same hand.

Then, with your arms resting on the arms of a chair, rotate your forearms so that your palms face the ceiling and then turn them to face the floor.

Keep your elbows fixed. Resting with palms facing up and hanging off the end of the armrest, bend your wrists up and down.

BUTTOCKS

'Spiky laundry detergent balls can relieve pain caused by sciatica (back pain that affects the lower half of the body, triggered by pressure on a nerve),' says Sammy Margo.

With sciatica, the buttocks can go into spasm; the pressure exerted by laundry balls helps to release pain and tension in the tissues that surround

the muscles.

'Sit on them, using your body weight to get the most pain relief as you move,' she says.



© Alamy

Scientists from Keele University have found that swearing can have a powerful painkilling effect, especially if you don't normally use bad language

SHOULDER

A frozen shoulder occurs when the flexible tissue around the joint becomes inflamed, reducing normal movement.

'These sorts of shoulder problems are increasing because we sit for long hours working at computer screens,' says Tim Allardyce.

'However, there is a great technique that uses a towel to gradually help improve mobility.'

Hold a towel using your good arm and place it at the base of your neck so it hangs down along the line of your spine.

Use the sore arm to hold the bottom of the towel. Let your sore arm relax, while the good arm pulls your sore arm gently up the back.

This increases the rotation in the shoulder and helps improve mobility. Start slowly and gently, and stop the exercise immediately if you get any pain.

Do this ten times, three times a day. Gradually, you should be able to lift the bad arm farther up the back as your mobility improves.

Using a door frame or a chin-up bar (available from Argos) to stretch out the joints can also help ease pain.

'It relieves pressure on the elbows, shoulders and spine,' says Tim Allardyce.

Hook the fingers of both hands over the top of the door frame.

Soften your legs so more weight is going through your arms and shoulders — as if you're hanging on to a bar of a climbing frame.

Keep your feet on the ground and relax your stomach and back. Hang for 15 seconds, then relax.

Repeat two or three times each day. If you get any pain, stop and seek advice from your GP.

HEEL

Many people find heel pain is worse in the morning.

A common cause is plantar fasciitis, inflammation of the connective tissues on the sole of the foot.

Stretching the tissue before getting out of bed can help. Loop a belt, scarf or rolled-up towel around your foot and use it to pull your toes towards your body while keeping your legs straight.

Repeat three times for both feet.

If you have painful arches, place a golf ball under the arch of your foot and roll it backwards and forwards for three to five minutes.

AND AS A LAST RESORT...

Turn the air blue. Scientists from Keele University have found that swearing can have a powerful painkilling effect, especially if you don't normally use bad language.

It's thought the pain-lessening effect occurs because swearing triggers the 'fight or flight' response, which makes us more able to deal with pain.



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[Eva](#), Dublin, 3 years ago

I discovered using a tennis ball to release painful neck and back muscles simply because I was desperate for some relief and it occurred to me to try a tennis ball I had lying around - it works brilliantly and I highly recommend it although you may look silly squatting up against the wall while writhing up and down looking very aroused!

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[sb](#), almere, nl, 3 years ago

I was going to mention the Thera cane. But somebody beat me to it. It is a wonderful invention!

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[Chris](#), Herts, 3 years ago

I have used a tennis ball, but as a long term sufferer I invested in two items - the first is called The Stick and works on the rolling pin principles and the second is the Thera Cane which allows you to apply pressure to virtually any part of the body, I have not looked back since and saved myself a fortune on physio

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[Juscoll](#), Clitheroe, Lancashire, 3 years ago

Most of these are also Yoga exercises. The one with the towel used for frozen shoulder is known as "head of a cow".

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[Sharon](#), Nailsea, UK, 3 years ago

Common sense and excellent advice! Need to push hard with the rolling pin to help a bad IT band though!

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[malia](#), Honolulu, Hawaii, 3 years ago

Ahhh! The tennis ball in the back works miracles. I do it several times a week and it works all of my kinks out. That and some stretching and I am a new woman!

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