

Want to be **STRONGER**, **FITTER** and
LESS PRONE TO INJURY? Stay
supple and pain free with this
advice from the specialists

SMART MOVES

EXPERTS
WISH
WE ALL
KNEW!



DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

Women have a tendency just to put up with things but, if you have a problem, it's worth making an appointment to see what can be done. Physiotherapists can assist with a wide range of ailments, including respiratory conditions, back pain, limited movement resulting from nerve damage caused by stroke, MS or Parkinson's, issues to do with bones, joints and soft tissue, and even incontinence. 'I see so many patients who are missing events with their children and having to plan their lives around where the nearest toilet is and if they can wear a pad - but often we can help them quite easily,' says Sinead McCarthy, physiotherapist at London-based Six Physio.

BODY BALANCE

* **That friend showing off her medal from her fifth 10k of the year isn't necessarily doing the best for her body long term... Cardio exercise is important, but you need to balance it with activities that help strengthen muscles and protect joints. 'We tend to think exercise has to involve a lot of sweating and burning calories, but you also need to focus on postural control, like Pilates,' says physio Sinead. 'Think in pairs: every muscle has an opposite, so if something is sore, you probably need to stretch the other side.'**



ACCEPT THAT YOU WON'T BE PERFECT

We all know we should be sitting up straight, and doing pelvic floor exercises in the supermarket queue, but it's easy for good habits to slip. If you find yourself slouching or realise you haven't done your squeezing for three days, don't give up. 'It's better to correct your posture 20 times a day until it eventually becomes natural than to keep slumping over,' says physiotherapist Sammy Margo. Even small changes go a long way - doing a quick, strong pelvic squeeze as you stand up or sneeze will help train the muscle to shut reflexively. To remind yourself to do your longer sets, try an app: Squeezy (£2.99), made by the NHS, sends you discreet reminders to exercise and provides graphics to make sure you're doing it right.

Stand up!

Manual labour used to be the main cause of back pain, but these days it's more likely to be due to long hours spent sitting down. Sitting still for eight hours a day leads to muscle weaknesses, which makes us more prone to injury when we do something physical. The advice you'll often hear is to stand up and move around every 20 to 30 minutes, but don't panic if that sounds like a lot. Physios realise this isn't practical in many busy workplaces and there are other, simpler tweaks to minimise the impact of being sedentary for so long. 'Arrange your work area so your feet are on the floor, with hips higher than your knees, and your stomach close to the desk so you're not reaching for your keyboard,' says physiotherapist Sinead. 'Your head should be aligned with your neck and spine so your chin isn't dipping forward, which pulls you out of position.' She also recommends standing up whenever possible - try a desk such as the VariDesk (uk.varidesk.com) that you can raise or lower - and doing small back twists to keep your muscles mobilised.

Hang on to your high heels (some of the time!)

The body's ability to adapt is brilliant, but it does struggle to cope with sudden changes. So if you spend most of your days in flat shoes and then switch to a pair of glitzy heels for a night out, your feet will be screaming at you to take them off by mid-evening. 'Wearing shoes that are the same height every day, whether heels or flats, will give you adaptive shortening, which means that your calf muscles get set in a fixed position,' explains physiotherapist Sammy Margo. 'It's about varying heel heights, which allows you to maintain that flexibility.'

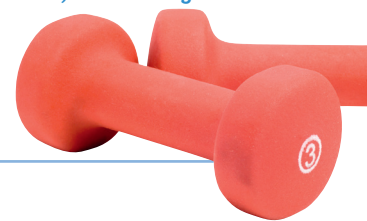


YOU MAY NOT BENEFIT FROM STRETCHING...

For years we were told that stretching was the key to flexibility, but new research suggests that pushing yourself for the sake of it could be damaging. 'Rather than stretching as far as you can and holding it there for a long time, you should be moving little and often in the right way,' says Sinead. Despite what you were told in PE lessons, it's more important to warm up muscles before exercise than to stretch them. If you try stretching a cold muscle, you're more likely to pull on the joint. Instead, warm up slowly into the activity, and wait until you're finished to do your stretching.

NO ONE'S TOO BUSY TO EXERCISE

* **Trying to incorporate exercise into your day can feel intimidating when it's already full, but getting active doesn't have to mean time-consuming gym sessions. 'It's about integrating activity into your daily life,' says Sammy. 'Experts recommend 150 minutes of moderate exercise a week, which is 30 minutes over five days. Break it down into bite-sized chunks of 10 or 15 minutes.' It's vital because, from the age of 25, our muscles atrophy 1% per year, and it's important to keep active to combat this natural decline.**



Googling for advice can be good!

When you are in pain and want a quick answer, most of us go online. In some cases, Googling your symptoms can be handy, as being able to suggest a cause at any subsequent physio appointment can be useful. However, there are so many different reasons why one area can be painful and treatments can be more or less effective on different people, so it's still a good idea to be assessed by a professional. As a general rule of thumb, if an injury isn't 80% better in seven days, book an appointment. □