

women's fitness

APRIL 2016
*AUS \$6.95 NZ \$7.99

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12-page guide
TO CRUSHING YOUR
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MAKE BAD
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WORK
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HACK YOUR FOOD HABITS SNEAKY WAYS TO EAT BETTER



Shakes, quivers, stabbing pains and stiffness... Yeah, your muscles have some strange communication methods! Here's how to work out what they're really trying to tell you

MUSCLE MAYHEM

THEY'RE USUALLY EASY-GOING AND FUN TO BE WITH, keeping you on the move and looking good. No, we don't mean your personal trainer, we're talking about your muscles. The same ones you hit hard with tough workouts, hot yoga and Friday night dance-offs. So it's no wonder they sometimes repay you with odd (and ouchy) behaviour: quivers, cramps, aches and pains are all weird ways your muscles like to tell you how they're doing.

But what exactly is going on when they chuck a wobbly – literally, mid-workout – or seize up afterwards, leaving you walking like you've aged 50 years? Most of the time, they're checking in with good news or a reminder to put your feet up. Read on to find out how to decipher your muscles' chat.

The message:

MUSCLE STRAINS

Muscles don't like surprises! Strains or tears usually happen when your muscle is stretched one way and you suddenly contract it to go in a different direction... but not all the fibres got the memo. Some or lots of the fibres can strain or even break, leaving you with a painful injury. Cue quality time with your couch and a bag of frozen peas for the RICE routine (that's the rest, ice, compression and elevation scenario).

✳️ **SORT IT:** Muscles might not like surprises but they do love being warmed up before you ask them to perform to

their max. Dr Sharon Hetherington, exercise physiologist from Exercise & Sports Science Australia, says a warm-up is important because it means your heart pumps harder, sending more blood and oxygen through your muscles, actually making them warmer for when you really need them. Build up to your exercise goals slowly and you'll face less time on the couch nursing a strain and more where you want to be – out there working up a sweat.

The message: NEXT-DAY ACHES

How can an hour of Pilates one day mean hobbling down stairs the next? Those sore quads are caused by your old friend DOMS – that's delayed onset muscle soreness – and while it can make you feel 100 years old, it's a positive sign that you've been working hard.

"When you exercise your muscles, you break them down, and get these micro tears," explains Dr Hetherington. "In a way you're damaging them for a good reason. You're overloading the muscles and exerting them so they grow stronger, and that's good!"

Your body sends chemicals to try to repair the muscles, causing swelling and soreness

"When you exercise your muscles, you break them down, and get these micro tears ... You're overloading the muscles and exerting them so they grow stronger"

the next day and beyond. It's these products that your body uses to heal itself that cause you to walk like a cowgirl, post-exercise.

✳️ **SORT IT:** Collapsing onto the couch for a restorative sesh of *Married at First Sight* might seem the perfect way to wrap up a hard workout, but it's also a good way to sign up for extra aches the next day. Instead, keep moving after your workout, and drink lots of water to help flush out the inflammation. "Do some active recovery like swimming or walking to help rid your body of the products that are broken down when you have been exercising the muscle," says Dr Hetherington.

The message: STITCHED UP

One minute you're powering through a 5km run, next you're holding your side because of a weird stabbing pain. A stitch is a great way to kill a good exercise vibe, and – sorry to be the bearer of bad news – scientists don't really know why we get them, but they tend to happen when you're tired or dehydrated.

✳️ **SORT IT:** A good warm-up, drinking enough water (without overdoing it) and skipping that heavy meal half an hour before exercising are all worth a try to avoid a stitch.

If it does strike, take the intensity down a notch and try to walk it off. Happily, the fitter you get, the less stitches you're likely to get!

The message: SUDDEN CRAMPS

There's nothing quite like the pain of a cramp to pull you up mid-workout. It's a sudden, strong contraction of a muscle, usually in the foot, calf, quad or hamstring. We know how they feel, but what causes cramps is a bit of a mystery. Possible culprits include shallow breathing, tiny tears in muscles, dehydration, exhaustion or an electrolyte imbalance, says WF physiotherapist Brad McIntosh.

✳️ **SORT IT:** "They're hard to prevent, but ensuring that you get adequate rest, remain hydrated, eat a balanced diet and stay fit will help," he tips. When a cramp strikes, try to gently stretch it out and hold for 30 seconds, says McIntosh. If the pain comes straight back, hold the stretch for another 30 seconds. When you're ready to get back to work, take it easy – your muscle could be vulnerable. "A cramp does make the muscle more susceptible to strain immediately after and for the next 24-48 hours," McIntosh adds.

The message: JELLY LEGS

We've all been there – you're killing it in the weights room and you're about to smash a PB. You load up the bar and go for a squat and... suddenly, you're dealing with major butt quivers and embarrassing leg shakes.

Your trembling body is a sign your muscles are getting really tired, which means the contractions that hold you in the move have become a bit patchy. "When you send a message to a muscle to contract, chemicals are released and one part of the muscle slides past another, causing it to shorten," says McIntosh. "When the muscle fatigues, or the intensity of the exercise is too great, the contraction falters and the muscle quivers."

✳️ **SORT IT:** It might look strange, but it's normal for your muscles to wobble when you put them under enough stress. The good news is, the more you train them, the less they'll shake. "Quivering is a signal that you're challenging a muscle and this will ultimately make it stronger," says McIntosh. "However, be aware that you're 'near the limit', and if you push the muscle too much you can cause damage." Your new rule for leg day? When the shakes start, it's time to call it. 🏠