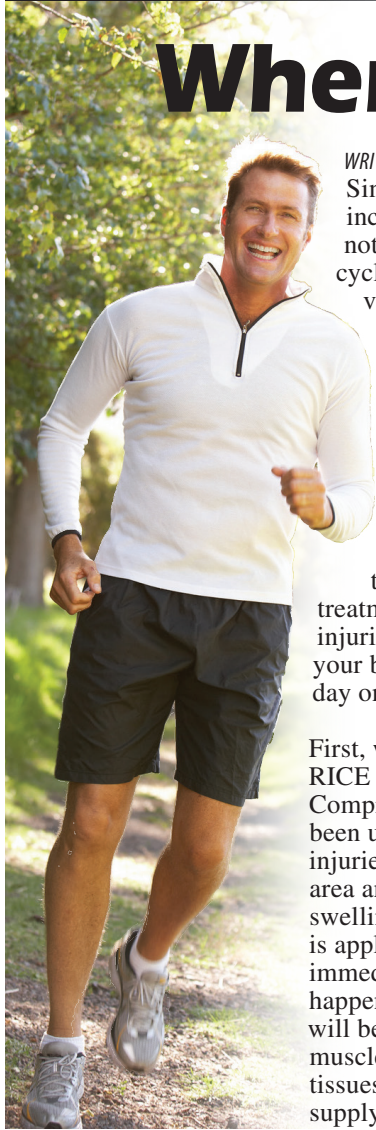


When Springing Forward Sets You Back



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Since “springing forward” to increased daylight hours, I’ve noticed more walkers, runners, cyclists, gardeners and other various weekend warriors out and active in the good weather. With increasing physical activity after a long winter hiatus, we often see a spate of appointments for sprains, strains, body aches and pains. In this article, I’m going to share some of the most common home treatments that we prescribe for injuries, so that you can support your body’s healing process from day one.

First, who remembers the acronym RICE for injuries? Rest, Ice, Compress and Elevate (RICE) has been used for years to treat acute injuries by protecting the injured area and reducing inflammation, swelling and pain. This treatment is applicable as a first aid treatment: immediately after an injury happens; when other treatments will be delayed; and for injuries to muscles which are well-perfused tissues (tissues with a good blood supply). RICE technique should

not be needed for more than a few days or beyond the acute stage of injury, unless directed by your healthcare provider.

Another acronym, MEAT, which stands for Movement, Exercise, Analgesia and Treatment, has been proposed as a treatment for injuries to tendons and ligaments, which have less blood supply and for ongoing care of all injuries. Movement is important to maintain flexibility, prevent adhesions and increase circulation immediately. Exercise begins later, after the acute stage of injury, and is used to strengthen the affected area for recovery and prevention of re-injury. Analgesia refers to utilizing herbs, homeopathics or medications to prevent pain without suppressing healing. Treatment refers to the variety of techniques such as adjustments, physical therapy, massage, acupuncture and physiotherapy (like ultrasound or electrical stimulation) that can enhance blood supply, support a healthy inflammatory response and speed healing.

One of the treatments I use after the first day or two of an acute injury or in chronic injuries is a

course of Contrast Hydrotherapy or alternating hot and cold. Though ice can be useful to decrease pain and swelling, it also diminishes blood supply, reduces the healthy inflammatory response and can delay healing. From a Chinese medicine perspective, it also causes stagnation and can result in increases in pain. Alternating hot and cold may be a much more appropriate treatment. The heat application enhances blood supply, increases local metabolism and relaxes muscles. When used together, the heat - cold cycles create a pumping effect bringing blood into and then pushing it back out.

Castor oil is another treatment for both acute injuries and chronic pain and often used simultaneously with contrast hydrotherapy. Castor oil is an irritating cathartic laxative when used internally, and is primarily for external use only. Used externally, it acts as a counter-inflammatory, soothes aching muscles and joints and softens adhesions and calcifications. Castor oil is highly effective in treating many kinds of pain and injury and I joke with my patients that I’ll make millions

when I invent a machine that dips us into castor oil!

Finally, I would be remiss to write about acute injuries without mentioning Arnica. Arnica montana, also known as wolf’s bane or mountain arnica, is a beautiful yellow flower and many preparations are available to help with trauma, bruising or injuries. I highly recommend both the Arnica 30C homeopathic tablets and an Arnica cream or gel be kept in first aid kits. I used to think of arnica specifically for bruising, but I’ve also had success using the topical treatment for arthritis.

Remember to stretch and work your way back into an active lifestyle this spring, but if you do find yourself injured, perhaps these suggestions might come in handy.

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