

HAMSTRUNG!!

Welcome to the first of 4 articles to help you get in shape before joining the hordes for the Clare People 10K on the 27TH of June. Hopefully you're well progressed along your running schedule at this stage. But sometimes even the best laid plans can go awry. For runners or indeed any athlete, this big enemy is the unexpected injury. One of the most common sporting injuries is the hamstring injury – pull, drag, strain, tear, call it what you will. Everyone who's anyone seems to have had one. But what exactly is the hamstring and how does it affect your running? Well the hamstrings are a group of muscles that cover the whole back of the thigh. They go from the base of the buttock to just below the knee and they help you to bring your heel up to your bum by bending your knee. They are very important in medium to high speed running and in turning, stopping and starting. Because they are long thin muscles they are particularly prone to injury. Injuring your hamstrings can range from feeling a mild nagging ache in the back of thigh that you can run through to a sudden catastrophic ripping feeling that stops you in your tracks. The damage done to the soft tissue itself can range from a few strained fibres to a massive tear right across the muscle, sometimes bringing a fragment of bone with it. The worst tears tend to occur in sports that involve sudden acceleration or deceleration such as fast field sports or sprinting. However long or medium distance runners can also suffer from hamstring injuries. These tend to be more in the nature of a long term strain of the tendon at the top or bottom of the hamstring. It feels very different to a sudden hamstring tear – more like a nagging dragging feeling that often only starts after a certain time or distance. It often goes away in between runs but keeps coming back. What causes these injuries? Well it has proved hard for researchers to pin down one risk factor over another. Fatigue, pre existing weakness, age and ethnicity have all been pinpointed. But the most significant predictive factor for a hamstring injury is having had one already, usually untreated or incorrectly diagnosed. Improved diagnostic techniques such as MRI scanning and isokinetic testing now mean doctors and chartered physiotherapists treating hamstring injuries have much more information available to them as to the type of hamstring problem they're dealing with. We can predict time to return to full strength based on isokinetic strength testing over the course of treatment. MRI scans can show the presence of a full thickness tear vs a partial tear which will allow for planning for slower vs faster return to sport. And we can also differentiate between muscle fibre injuries and tendon pathology which can be much harder to treat and clear.

All in all the most important point is not to ignore that drag in the back of your thigh. Call your local Chartered Physiotherapist (see Golden Pages for one near you) for an appointment and have your hamstring injury accurately diagnosed and treated as soon as you can. It's in your interest!

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