When to see a doctor: red flags

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Safety guide: when to stop exercising and get medical help. This page doesn't replace medical advice.

Most aches from training are harmless and fade within days. But some symptoms need a doctor, and a few need emergency care right away. If you're unsure, get checked.

Why it matters: A coach who sees you in person would spot these warning signs. Online, it's up to you. Knowing them lets you train with confidence and act fast when something isn't right.

Call 911 now

- **Chest pain, pressure or tightness** during or after exercise, especially spreading to the arm, jaw or back.
- **Fainting or nearly fainting** during exercise.
- **Sudden severe shortness of breath** that doesn't settle with rest, or an asthma attack that doesn't respond to your inhaler.
- **Sudden weakness or numbness** of the face, arm or leg, slurred speech, or confusion.
- **Severe headache** that comes on suddenly, like a thunderclap.
- **Confusion, vomiting or collapse** during long events or in heat. This can mean heat stroke or low blood sodium.

See a doctor promptly (within a day or two)

- **Heart racing or skipping** that's new or doesn't settle quickly.
- **Back pain with** fever, numbness in the groin or buttocks, new bladder or bowel problems, or weakness in a leg.
- **Pain that wakes you at night** or is there all the time, even at rest.

- **Numbness, tingling or weakness** in an arm or leg that doesn't go away.
- **Severe muscle pain and swelling with dark, cola-colored urine** after hard exercise.
- **A joint that locks, gives way,** or swells quickly after an injury.
- **A pop or tearing feeling** with swelling, bruising or weakness.
- **Calf pain and swelling,** especially in one leg, after travel, surgery or during pregnancy.
- **Unexplained weight loss** or ongoing fatigue.

See a doctor or physical therapist soon

- Pain that hasn't improved after 2 weeks of easier training.
- Pain that keeps coming back in the same spot.
- Missed periods for 3 months or more in someone who isn't pregnant (see "Women's health and training").

Pain rules for training

What you feel	What to do
Muscle burn during a set	Normal
Dull ache in trained muscles a day or two later	Normal soreness; train lightly
Mild discomfort that eases as you warm up	Usually fine; keep loads light
Sharp pain, or pain in a joint	Stop that exercise; try an easier version
Pain that gets worse as you go	Stop for the day
Pain that lingers or keeps returning	See a health professional

Before you start a new program

Use the safety self-check. Talk to your doctor first if you have heart disease, high blood pressure that isn't controlled, diabetes, kidney disease, or symptoms such as chest pain or dizziness with activity.

Food, weight and exercise

If eating, weight or exercise feel out of control, or you're exercising to make up for food, help is available. Call the National Alliance for Eating Disorders helpline at **1-866-662-1235** (weekdays, staffed by licensed therapists).

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