Following intense exercise the body needs some time to repair and recover. During exercise, muscle cells can become damaged and require time to heal to increase their strength and endurance for the next intense activity. This break down and repair is how muscle performance improves over time. In the short term though the breakdown means that muscle movement relies on fewer cells so each cell in having to produce more force to control your movement.

Additionally, exercise causes a depletion of the energy stores in the cells and a build up of chemicals in the space between muscle cells which increase the sensitivity of muscles to pain. In the days following intense exercise, it is perfectly normal to feel an aching sensation, particularly when doing activities like going downstairs. Even though it is a normal part of recovery it isn’t a pleasant experience and so I have compiled some top tips for speeding up the recovery process.

1. **Keep Moving** - Although sore at first the changes of pressure and increased blood flow can help deliver valuable nutrients to muscles and remove waste chemicals which will speed the process up. This shouldn’t be high intensity exercise but activities like walking, swimming or low resistance cycling can all help keep the muscles working.

2. **Eat a Balanced Diet** - The body needs a diverse range of nutrients to repair the muscle cells so ensuring your diet includes a variety of proteins, fats and carbohydrates can help support this process in the days following intense activity.

3. **Keep hydrated** - Especially important during hot weather. Keeping hydrated will allow the muscle cells to remain strong and help the body get rid of the waste products. Drinking water mixed with a small amount of salt or sugar helps the body to absorb more of the fluid.

4. **Heat and Cold** - Although heat is not recommended immediately following intense activities in the subsequent days both heat and cold can increase blood flow and decrease sensations of pain. Please remember not to directly apply hot or cold to the skin but to include a dry barrier layer in between.

5. **Massage** - If the pain is not improving following the above advice massage can be a useful addition to the recovery process. Depending on the stage of recovery different techniques can be used, in general massage provides similar benefits to movement but can be targeted more directly at specific areas and muscle groups.

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