Side stitch prevention? [1]

Dear Alice,

Are there any good ways to prevent a side stitch? I know that one should breath out heavily if the stitch has already developed, but by then it's usually too late.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Many people experience a side stitch, which is a sharp pain in the side of the abdomen, when they exercise. The exact cause of these side stitches can vary from person to person. This condition, technically referred to as exercise-related transient abdominal pain, is often associated with a muscle spasm in the diaphragm. Some research indicates that the amount of food eaten prior to exercising may influence the occurrence of side stitches.

Side stitches can occur with any type of exercise, but seem to be most commonly associated with jogging and running. Some of the following tips may help lower the frequency at which side stitches occur:

- Delaying exercise or activity for a longer period of time after eating, if your side stitches occur when you exercise after eating.
- Sticking to long, low intensity workouts, instead of quick, high intensity ones.
- Warming-up and gradually picking up workout pace may help prevent side stitches, regardless of exercise intensity.
- Building stretches of speed intervals into your workout in order to strengthen your abdominal muscles and diaphragm. Some believe weak abs and diaphragms cause side stitches so making them stronger may help to prevent side stitch occurrences.
- Continuing to work out at an even pace; some researchers found that people with better aerobic fitness tend to get fewer side stitches. Therefore, the more you build up your endurance and cardiovascular fitness, the less likely you are to wind up with a side stitch.
- Avoiding shallow breathing; instead taking slow, deep breaths during exercise.

If these prevention strategies fail to help, and you do get a side stitch, slowing down and breathing deeply is one way to alleviate the pain. Two other things you can try are: (1) bending over while tightening your stomach muscles a few times; and, (2) applying pressure to the area with your fingers, giving yourself a sort of "pressure massage" where the pain is. For this, try pushing your fingers deeply into your stomach in a spot just below your right ribs, while pursing your lips and exhaling as hard as you can. Simply grunting loudly while...
breathing out may also help, as could slowing down until the pain is gone.

Occasionally, side stitches might come from an allergy or intolerance to wheat or dairy products. Side stitches may occur up to 24 hours after eating or drinking something that contains this product. To see if this applies to you, you might want to keep record of your meals, snacks and physical activities and see if your side stitches occur after eating a specific food or food group. Side stitches may also be mistaken for pain in the heart caused by lack of oxygen. If the pain comes from under the breastbone, or radiates down your left arm, makes you out of breath and comes from exercise or strenuous physical activity, your best bet would be to see a health care provider as soon as possible.

Hopefully, following the tips above and listening to your body will ensure that most of your stitches come only after those hysterical jokes.

Alice!
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