

Emergency and Urgent Care – Thigh Injury – Hamstrings



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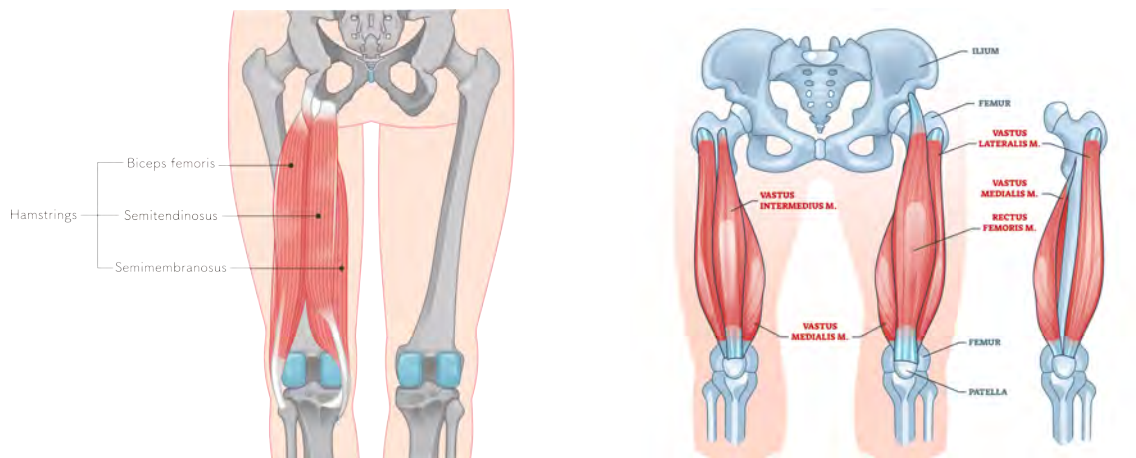
The two main groups of muscles in the thigh that can be injured:

Quadriceps muscles (front of leg):

Vastus lateralis, vastus medialis, vastus intermedius, rectus femoris.

Hamstring muscles (back of leg):

Semitendinosus, semimembranosus, biceps femoris.



What is a pulled hamstring?

A pulled hamstring (strain or tear) is damage to the muscles at the back of your thigh. Physiotherapy is an important part of recovery.

How does a pulled hamstring happen?

It usually happens when the muscle contracts while stretched, for example:

- Running or sprinting.
- Stretching (e.g. gymnastics, martial arts).

Sprint-related hamstring strains

- Occur during fast running.
- Usually affect the lower part of the muscle.
- Often feel severe at first but heal quicker.

Stretch-related hamstring strains

- Occur higher up the back of the thigh.

- Often involve the tendon.
- Take longer to heal due to poorer blood supply.

Referred pain

- Pain from the lower back or hip felt in the thigh.
- Can increase risk of repeated injury.

What are the symptoms of a pulled hamstring?

- Sudden pain in the back of the thigh.
- Possible tearing sensation.

You may also have:

- Muscle spasm.
- Weakness.
- Swelling.
- Reduced movement.

Pain may worsen after activity as swelling develops.

What should I do if I have a pulled hamstring?

The first 24–48 hours are important:

P – Painkillers

- Use paracetamol and/or ibuprofen if suitable.
- Follow instructions and check with a pharmacist if unsure.

R – Rest

- Reduce activity for the first 2 days.
- Avoid running or heavy activity.
- Keep the leg gently moving.

I – Ice

- Apply wrapped ice for up to 20 minutes every 2 hours (first 3 days).

- Then 3 times daily until swelling settles.
- Do not place ice directly on skin.

M – Mobilisation

- Start walking normally as soon as possible.
- Early movement helps healing.

E – Elevation

- Keep your leg raised above hip level for the first 2 days.

What shouldn't I do if I have a pulled hamstring?

For the first few days avoid:

- Heat (hot baths/showers).
- Stretching.
- Massage.
- Alcohol.
- Overuse of the leg.

These can increase bleeding and swelling.

Physiotherapy treatment for a pulled hamstring

Physiotherapy helps recovery by:

- Assessing the injury.
- Providing a treatment plan and recovery timeline.

Treatment may include:

- Manual therapy.
- Exercise programmes.
- Massage.
- Sports rehabilitation.
- Hydrotherapy.

Could there be any long-term effects?

Most injuries heal within 8 weeks. Long-term problems are more likely if:

- The injury is severe.
- Early treatment was not followed.

Poor recovery can lead to weakness and repeat injury.

Hamstring strain exercises

Both stretching and strengthening are important:

- Start stretching only when pain allows.
- Progress from gentle stretches to movement-based exercises.
- Add strengthening gradually.

Hamstring stretching exercises

Do not stretch for the first 2–4 days.

Start when walking is pain-free.

Straight leg hamstring stretch

- Place foot on a surface and lean forward.
- Keep leg straight and chest up.
- Hold a gentle stretch (not painful).
- 3 × 10 seconds, once or twice daily.



Bent leg hamstring stretch

- Lie on your back and lift your leg slightly bent.
- Pull until a gentle stretch is felt.
- 3 × 10 seconds, once or twice daily.



Hamstring strengthening exercises

Start gently and only if pain-free.

Standing knee flexion

- Bend one knee while standing.
- Begin slowly.
- Build from 3 × 10 reps to 4 × 20.



Hamstring catches

- Let your leg drop and catch it before it straightens.
- Start 1 × 10 reps, build to 3 × 15.



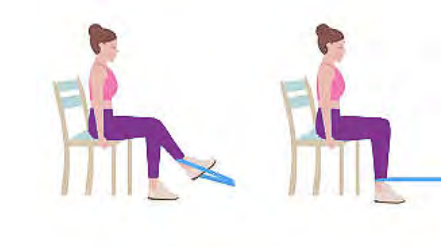
Bridge exercises

- Lie on your back, knees bent, lift hips.
- Start with both legs, progress to one leg.
- Build from 3 × 8 to 3 × 12.



Seated hamstring curl

- Use a resistance band.
- Pull heel towards your buttocks.
- Build from 3 × 8 to 3 × 12–15.



Returning to physical activity

- Return gradually depending on your job/sport.
- Staying active helps recovery.
- Light duties or breaks may be needed.

- Increase activity as strength and movement improve.

Driving

You can drive when you can:

- Perform an emergency stop safely.
- Fully control the vehicle.

Check with your insurance company.

Physiotherapy

If needed, seek physiotherapy support for guidance and recovery planning.

Work

- You can self-certify sickness for up to 7 days.
- Provide a self-certification form to your employer.
- For longer absence, contact your GP.

Possible complications

Seek medical advice if:

- Pain continues despite treatment
- You have tingling or numbness
- You notice swelling, redness, or signs of a blood clot
- You develop chest pain

Other formats

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