



UNDERSTANDING DOMS (DELAYED ONSET MUSCLE SORENESS)

That deep, achy soreness you feel a day or two after a hard workout has a name: Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness, or DOMS. It's one of the most common questions I get from clients, so here's what's actually happening in your body — and what it does and doesn't mean for your progress.

1 WHAT IS DOMS?

DOMS is soreness and stiffness that develops in muscle tissue after unaccustomed or intense exercise — especially new movements, increased load, or extra eccentric work (the lowering/lengthening portion of a lift, like the descent in a squat). It's caused by microscopic damage to muscle fibers and the surrounding connective tissue, along with the inflammatory response your body triggers to repair it. This is a normal, expected part of adaptation — not an injury.

2 HOW LONG DOES IT LAST?

DOMS typically follows a predictable timeline:



3 HOW TO RELIEVE THE SYMPTOMS

- **Keep moving.** Light activity (walking, easy cycling) and gentle movement of the sore muscle group increases blood flow and often eases stiffness faster than staying still.
- **Active recovery days.** Low-intensity training on non-lifting days keeps you moving without adding new muscle damage.
- **Prioritize sleep.** Most muscle repair happens during deep sleep — this is one of the biggest levers you control.
- **Stay on top of protein and hydration.** Both support the repair process.
- **Gentle stretching or foam rolling** can take the edge off stiffness, though it won't eliminate DOMS entirely.
- **Give it time.** DOMS resolves on its own — there's no need to "push through" a heavy session on the same muscle group while it's still very sore.

A COMMON MYTH: "NO SORENESS = NO GAINS"

Soreness is **not** a reliable measure of whether a workout "worked." As your body adapts to a training program, DOMS naturally decreases — even while you continue to get stronger and build muscle. Strength gains and muscle growth come from progressive overload, consistency, and recovery over time, not from how sore you feel the next day. Don't chase soreness, and don't worry when it fades — that's often a sign of progress, not a lack of it.