

BE WELL

‘Oh, My Aching Muscles!’

By Debbie DeAngelo
August 2022

Editor’s note: Following is the latest article by Jefferson health and wellness expert Debbie DeAngelo.

Sore from your workout? Tight from yardwork? Stiff from driving? A massage gun might just be the answer to your muscle aches and pains.

I first became acquainted with the therapeutic wonders of a massage gun while undergoing physical therapy. The therapist would use it to loosen up the muscles and relieve knots prior to my treatment. I soon became a fan and bought one for myself.

Although not the same as a getting a massage from a licensed professional, these rechargeable, handheld, gun-shaped tools are a popular do-it-yourself option to relieve muscle soreness, knots, and tightness. The pulsating nozzle works into your muscles to release the tension and relax them. The vibration produced from this percussive device increases circulation to the affected muscles and flushes out the lactic acid that accumulates when muscles are overworked, which may aid in recovery after exercising.

These handy, portable massage guns can be used on virtually any muscle, but it’s important to start off low and slow before gradually increasing the pressure and speed. Move the device gently back and forth over the affected muscle. Limit the time to just a few minutes per muscle group because over-stimulating a muscle can trigger more inflammation and bruising. Don’t use it on bones or joints and be especially careful if you have a chronic muscle pain disorder. Avoid using it in

an area of a blood clot (deep vein thrombosis), wound, or implantable medical device (i.e., pacemaker).

If you're ready to try using a massage gun, here are some features to consider and evaluate.

Noise. These powerful tools can be louder than you'd expect. The motor noise becomes particularly annoying when near your ears, such as when massaging the shoulders. **Volume** is often mentioned in online customer reviews.

Ergonomics. Even though someone can assist you while using the massage gun, the devices are designed for you to be able to use yourself. Weighing in at one to three pounds, it will only take a few minutes to be able to tell the difference between a lightweight model and a heavyweight model. If it's too heavy, it will become cumbersome and may not be as convenient for travel. Look for a model that is manageable and easily allows you to reach all areas of your body. An in-store purchase will allow you to assess this feature.

Stall Force. This refers to the amount of pressure you can apply to the tool before the motor stalls or drags. Applying pressure helps to get deep into the muscle, so this is an essential consideration. Amplitude, the depth at which the massage gun pulses, will also affect motor drag. A product with greater amplitude will automatically massage deeper into the tissue, so you won't need to use as much force.

Versatility. Look for a massage gun with a variety of nozzle head attachments, as well as speed and power settings. Not all muscle groups are the same size, nor can they withstand the same amount of pressure. A versatile product can accommodate more sensitive muscles. Since no one really wants to use the device while it's plugged in, be sure to note the battery life. Typically, it will range from two to eight hours. Your preference may depend upon how frequently you plan to use it.

Price. The price range can run from just under \$100 to several hundred dollars. Be sure to compare the features offered between models, peruse customer reviews, and read consumer-oriented articles from reputable sources on the subject.

After each massage session, drink a full glass of water to help the muscles escort the lactic acid out of your body. And remember, a massage gun isn't a silver bullet. Be sure to engage in regular stretching, become physically fit, and eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Other muscle soothing strategies include soaking in Epsom salts, consuming magnesium daily, and trying Arnica gel to reduce inflammation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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