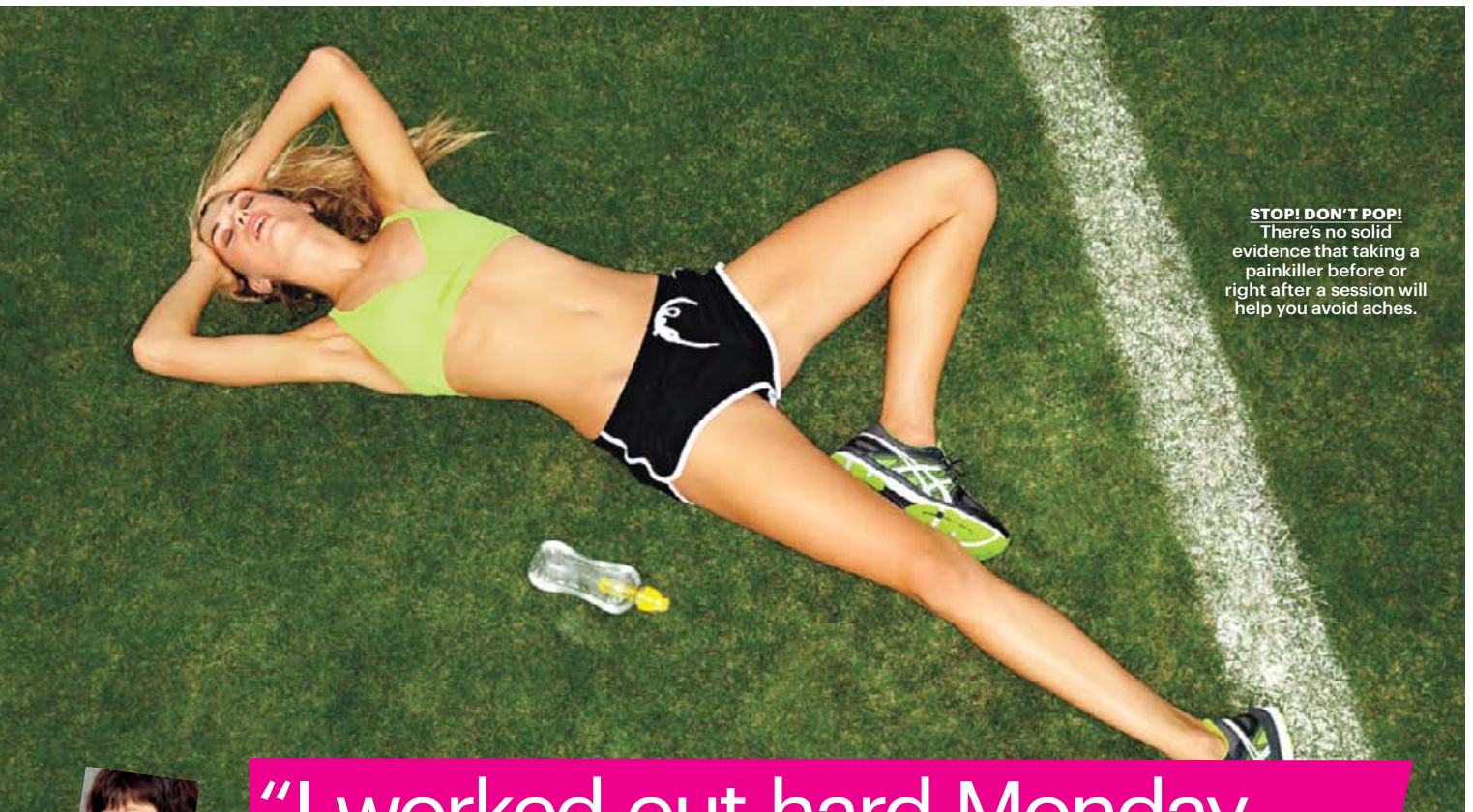


+YOUR BODY ON EXERCISE



STOP! DON'T POP!
There's no solid evidence that taking a painkiller before or right after a session will help you avoid aches.



Ashley, 29,
Topeka, Kansas

"I worked out hard Monday. Why am I sore Wednesday?"

Bizarre, right? You take a new class or road test a SELF Dying to Try It move, and your muscles are screaming...two days later. There's a scientific term for the why-now effect: **delayed-onset muscle soreness, or DOMS**. It can happen anytime you tax muscles in a foreign way. You cause microscopic damage to the tissue (not a bad thing—it's how you build stronger lean muscle), and waves of white blood cells rush in to patch things up. While they're at it, they release chemicals that set off pain receptors, says Robert Hyldahl, Ph.D., an exercise physiologist at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. The process peaks in about 36 hours (hence the delay), which is about when you want to reach for the Advil. Resist. The latest research says blunting the hurt may also blunt your body's ability to rebuild muscle, meaning you get stronger more slowly. But if hobbling isn't an option, our experts OK'd the fixes at right. —Andrea Bartz

Make it hurt a little less

MOVE Yes, you're sore—but probably not injured. So this is not a free pass to park it on the couch. Actually, the best thing you can do is more exercise. Even a five-minute walk will increase blood flow, decreasing stiffness, says Scott Duke, a sports-rehabilitation expert in New York City. And if you can tough it out and repeat that hard session, your muscles will quickly begin to familiarize themselves with the movements and eventually will feel no pain.

KNEAD A legit massage is the ultimate relief and, if you're rich or a pro athlete, a great idea. The rest of us can DIY and still benefit, Duke says. Using your thumbs, start at the lowest point of the sore spot (calf, thigh, whatever) and rub upward in slow, deep circles.

SOAK Fill your tub with Epsom or scented bath salts. They contain magnesium sulfate, which, when absorbed through skin, reduces ouchy inflammation. Like you needed an excuse to take a hot bath.