

Science puts the squeeze on compression garments

By Teal Burrell, *Outside*

As tight as they are bright, compression socks, sleeves, shorts, and pants promise to boost performance and recovery. But scientists aren't entirely sure how – or if – compression gear works as advertised, questioning its usefulness in competition and recovery.

We might be better off, they say, lounging around in compression than we are racing in it.

There is moderate evidence to support wearing compression gear after a long race or workout. Jessica Hill, a sports scientist at St. Mary's University in Twickenham, England, tested the gear's effect on recovery in two groups of marathoners. When asked to hold a squat the day after the marathon – a formidable task – those who immediately and continuously donned compression leggings post-race (removing them only to shower) reported less quadriceps soreness compared to those in the control group. Hill also reviewed 12 studies examining compression gear and recovery.

The resulting data showed compression gear provided a modest reduction in soreness and muscle damage while restoring both leg strength and power, possibly by reducing inflammation.

“For an athlete who needs to do lots of training programmed quite closely together that could be an advantage,” Hill says. For others, “The only benefit they're likely to get out of it is probably reduced soreness.”

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