

Sports injuries

Sports injuries are commonly caused by overuse, direct impact, or the application of force that is greater than the body part can structurally withstand. There are two kinds of sports injuries: acute and chronic. An injury that occurs suddenly, such as a sprained ankle caused by an awkward landing, is known as an acute injury.

Chronic injuries are caused by repeated overuse of muscle groups or joints. Poor technique and structural abnormalities can also contribute to the development of chronic injuries. Medical investigation of any sports injury is important, because you may be hurt more severely than you think. For example, what seems like an ankle sprain may actually be a bone fracture.

Types of sports injuries

Some of the more common sports injuries include:

- **Ankle sprain** – symptoms include pain, swelling and stiffness.
- **Bruises** – a blow can cause small bleeds into the skin.
- **Concussion** – mild reversible brain injury from a blow to the head, which may be associated with loss of consciousness. Symptoms include headache, dizziness and short term memory loss.
- **Cuts and abrasions** – are usually caused by falls. The knees and hands are particularly prone.
- **Dehydration** – losing too much fluid can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- **Dental damage** – a blow to the jaw can crack, break or dislodge teeth.
- **Groin strain** – symptoms include pain and swelling.
- **Hamstring strain** – symptoms include pain, swelling and bruising.
- **Knee joint injuries** – symptoms include pain, swelling and stiffness. The ligaments, tendons or cartilage can be affected.
- **Nose injuries** – either blood nose or broken nose, are caused by a direct blow.
- **Stress fractures** – particularly in the lower limbs. The impact of repeated jumping or running on hard surfaces can eventually stress and crack bone.

First aid for sprains, strains and joint injuries

Suggestions on immediate treatment for sprains, strains and joint injuries, to prevent further damage include:

- **Rest** – keep the injured area supported and avoid using for 48-72 hours.
- **Ice** – apply ice to the injured area for 20 minutes every two hours for the first 48-72 hours.
- **Compression** – apply a firm elastic bandage over the area, extending above and below the painful site.
- **Elevation** – raise the injured area above the level of the heart at all times.
- **Referral** – as soon as possible, see a qualified healthcare professional.
- **No Heat** – heat will increase bleeding.
- **No Alcohol** – alcohol increases bleeding and swelling.
- **No Running** – running or exercise increases blood flow, delaying healing.
- **No Massage** – massage increases swelling and bleeding, also delaying healing.

First aid for nose bleeds

Suggestions include:

- Stop the activity.
- Sit with the head leaning forward.
- Pinch the nostrils together and breathe through your mouth.
- Hold the nose for at least 10 minutes.
- If bleeding continues past 30 minutes, seek medical advice.

First aid for dislodged teeth

It may be possible to save the tooth with prompt dental treatment. Rinse the tooth in water or milk and see your dentist immediately.

Emergency situations

Call an ambulance for:

- prolonged loss of consciousness
- neck or spine injuries
- broken bones
- injuries to the head or face
- eye injuries
- abdominal injuries.

Treatment for sports injuries

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the injury. Always see your doctor if pain persists after a couple of days. What you may think is a straightforward sprain may actually be a fractured bone.

Physiotherapy can help to rehabilitate the injured site and, depending on the injury, may include exercises to promote strength and flexibility. Returning to sport after injury depends on your doctor's or physiotherapist's assessment. Trying to play before the injury is properly healed will only cause further damage and delay recovery.

The biggest single risk factor for soft tissue injury is a previous injury. In the meantime, you can maintain your fitness by choosing forms of exercise that don't involve your injury; for example, ride a stationary bicycle while your sprained wrist is healing.

Prevention of sports injuries

You can reduce your risk of sports injuries if you:

- Warm up thoroughly by gently going through the motions of your sport and performing slow, sustained stretches.
- Wear appropriate footwear.
- Tape or strap vulnerable joints, if necessary.
- Use the appropriate safety equipment, such as mouth guards, helmets and pads.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after the game.
- Try to avoid exercising in the hottest part of the day, between 11am and 3pm.
- Maintain a good level of overall fitness, particularly in the "off season".
- Cross-train with other sports to ensure overall fitness and muscle strength.
- Ensure training includes appropriate speed and impact work so muscles are capable of the demands of a game situation.
- Don't exert yourself beyond your level of fitness. Gradually increase intensity and duration of training.
- Use good form and technique.
- Cool down after sport with gentle, sustained stretches.
- Allow adequate recovery time between sessions.
- Have regular medical checkups.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Sports medicine clinic
- Physiotherapist
- Hospital emergency department
- In an emergency, always call 000 for an ambulance
- Australian Physiotherapy Association Tel. (03) 9092 0866

Things to remember

- Sports injuries are commonly caused by overuse, direct impact, or the application of force that is greater than the body part can structurally withstand.
- Common injuries include bruises, sprains, strains, joint injuries and nose bleeds.
- Medical investigation is important, as leaving an injury untreated can have far more severe consequences.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

University of Melbourne - Centre for Health, Exercise and Sports Medicine

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2014 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.