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Sports Injuries: Types and Tips for Prevention

Ouch! Sports injuries are painful. They're also a part of life for most athletes—even for young amateur athletes who play sports as part of extracurricular programs at school.

Teenagers who play sports regularly can suffer nearly the same number of sports-related injuries as professional athletes. Teenagers are also still growing, so they are more vulnerable to certain types of sports injuries. Fortunately, the most common sports injuries are usually not serious and are relatively easy to treat.

Types of Injuries

Many sports injuries are acute, which means they occur suddenly during an activity. Other injuries are chronic, or recurring, and are often caused by repetitive activities that overwork muscles and tendons.

A fracture affects a bone and is a break of any size. Finger fractures are among the most common sports-related injuries. Shin splints, a common chronic injury for runners, are a kind of stress fracture.

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Sprains and strains are two common injuries that sound alike. To an athlete suffering a sprain or strain, the pain may even feel similar. But the two are actually very different. A strain is a stretch or tear in a muscle or tendon. In contrast, a sprain occurs when a ligament stretches or tears. Ankles, wrists, and knees are the most commonly sprained parts of the body.

A concussion is another common sports-related injury. A concussion is caused by a blow to the head that shakes the brain inside the skull. Symptoms may include losing consciousness for a short time immediately after the injury, followed by seeing stars, dizziness, nausea, headaches, confusion, and inability to focus.

Treatment

Sprains and strains are soft-tissue injuries. Applying an ice pack to a sprain or strain immediately after the injury occurs can help reduce swelling. So can using compression wraps. Some soft-tissue injuries benefit from gentle exercise or movement and heal more quickly and fully that way. Soft-tissue injuries are treated differently from bone fractures. A broken bone is usually set in place and

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immobilized so it heals properly. Some fractures are accompanied by soft-tissue injuries and require integrated treatment. Mild concussions are often treated with rest, but severe ones can require major medical treatment.

Tips for Preventing Injuries

Athletes can prevent some kinds of injuries by following a few tips before playing a sport.

1. Get a Physical Examination

A sports physical can identify potential problems before they cause minor or serious injuries. Many organized sports programs require a doctor's form that confirms an athlete is fit to play. It's a good idea to get checked out before starting any sport, even if this exam is not required.

2. Start by Training

Athletes should follow training guidelines to work up to a high level of fitness before playing at full intensity. It takes time to get fit. Different sports may have different training regimens, or routines, but most require a mix of strength training and endurance.

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3. Warm Up Every Time You Play

Student athletes should avoid quick starts. Warm-ups loosen muscles and get them ready to play. Experts recommend a mix of stretches that includes holding stretches, such as toe touches, and moving stretches, such as jumping jacks.

No Pain, No Gain?

Although the phrase “No pain, no gain” may apply to healthy athletes who are training, it is bad advice for someone with any injury, whether chronic or acute. If an athlete gets hurt or feels pain, or if something just doesn’t feel right, it’s important to stop and get it checked out right away. For some athletes, it may be tempting to try to “tough it out,” but playing through the pain of a sports injury is likely to make it worse. Sure, it can be frustrating to miss a game. But the costs of playing when injured can be high and can result in permanent damage to the body.