



SOCCER INJURIES

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the world and the fastest-growing team sport in the United States. Although soccer provides an enjoyable form of aerobic exercise and helps develop balance, agility, coordination, and a sense of teamwork, soccer players must be aware of the risks for injury. Injury prevention, early detection, and treatment can keep kids and adults on the field long-term.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SOCCER INJURIES AND THEIR SYMPTOMS?

Injuries to the lower extremities are the most common in soccer. These injuries may be traumatic, such as a kick to the leg or a twist to the knee, or result from overuse of a muscle, tendon, or bone.



SOCCER

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON SOCCER INJURIES?

Lower Extremity Injuries

Sprains and strains are the most common lower extremity injuries. The severity of these injuries varies. Cartilage tears and anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) sprains in the knee are some of the more common injuries that may require surgery. Other injuries include fractures and contusions from direct blows to the body.

Overuse Lower Extremity Injuries

Shin splints (soreness in the calf), patellar tendinitis (pain in the knee), and Achilles tendinitis (pain in the back of the ankle) are some of the more common soccer overuse conditions. Soccer players are also prone to groin pulls and thigh and calf muscle strains.

Stress fractures occur when the bone becomes weak from overuse. It is often difficult to distinguish stress fractures from soft tissue injury. If pain develops in any part of your lower extremity and does not clearly improve after a few days of rest, a physician should be consulted to determine whether a stress fracture is present.

Upper Extremity Injuries

Injuries to the upper extremities usually occur from falling on an outstretched arm or from player-to-player contact. These conditions include wrist sprains, wrist fractures, and shoulder dislocations.

Head, Neck, and Face Injuries

Injuries to the head, neck, and face include cuts and bruises, fractures, neck sprains, and concussions. A concussion is any alteration in an athlete's mental state due to head trauma and should always be evaluated by a physician. Not all those who experience a concussion lose consciousness.

HOW ARE SOCCER INJURIES TREATED?

Participation should be stopped immediately until any injury is evaluated and treated properly. Most injuries are minor and can be treated by a short period of rest, ice, and elevation. If a trained health care professional such as a sports medicine physician or athletic trainer is available to evaluate an injury, often a decision can be made to allow an athlete to continue playing immediately. The athlete should return to play only when clearance is granted by a health care professional.

Overuse injuries can be treated with a short period of rest, which means that the athlete can continue to perform or practice some activities with modifications. In many cases, pushing through pain can be harmful,

especially for stress fractures, knee ligament injuries, and any injury to the head or neck. Contact your doctor for proper diagnosis and treatment of any injury that does not improve after a few days of rest.

You should return to play only when clearance is granted by a health care professional.

HOW CAN SOCCER INJURIES BE PREVENTED?

- Have a pre-season physical examination and follow your doctor's recommendations
- Use well-fitting cleats and shin guards — there is some evidence that molded and multi-studded cleats are safer than screw-in cleats
- Be aware of poor field conditions that can increase injury rates
- Use properly sized synthetic balls — leather balls that can become waterlogged and heavy are more dangerous, especially when heading
- Watch out for mobile goals that can fall on players and request fixed goals whenever possible
- Hydrate adequately — waiting until you are thirsty is often too late to hydrate properly
- Pay attention to environmental recommendations, especially in relation to excessively hot and humid weather, to help avoid heat illness
- Maintain proper fitness — injury rates are higher in athletes who have not adequately prepared physically.
- After a period of inactivity, progress gradually back to full-contact soccer through activities such as aerobic conditioning, strength training, and agility training.
- Avoid overuse injuries — more is not always better! Many sports medicine specialists believe that it is beneficial to take at least one season off each year. Try to avoid the pressure that is now exerted on many young athletes to over-train. Listen to your body and decrease training time and intensity if pain or discomfort develops. This will reduce the risk of injury and help avoid "burn-out"
- Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if you have any concerns about injuries or prevention strategies

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Sports Tips provide general information only and are not a substitute for your own good judgement or consultation with a physician. To order multiple copies of this fact sheet or learn more about sports injury prevention, please visit www.STOPSportsInjuries.org.