



Tips to Prevent Common Sports Injuries

Prepared by Dr. Michael W. Gish, Orthopedic Surgeon and Medical Director for PA Classics

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the world and the fastest-growing team sport in the United States. As of 2006, the U.S. was the #1 country in the world for participation in youth soccer, with 3.9 million American youths (2.3 million boys and 1.6 million girls) registered with U.S. Soccer. Among girls, the U.S. has more registered players than all other countries combined.

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 players on the field long-term.

What are some common soccer injuries?

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 they may result from overuse of a muscle, tendon, or bone. Sprains and strains are the most common lower extremity injuries seen in soccer. The severity of these injuries varies. Meniscus cartilage tears and anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries in the knee are some of the more common injuries that may require surgery.

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 usually 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.

How can soccer injuries be prevented?

Soccer is a contact sport so a certain amount of injury is to be expected and cannot be completely eliminated. However following the recommendations listed below can help to lower the rate of injury:

- Be aware of poor field conditions that can increase injury rates
- 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



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- 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”
- Injury prevention programs such as the FIFA 11+ have been shown to reduce sports injuries including ACL injuries in both male and female athletes, ankle sprains and hamstring muscle injuries. Elements of the FIFA 11+ program are incorporated into the dynamic warm-up programs that many PA Classics teams utilize.
- Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if you have any concerns about injuries or prevention strategies

For more information see these websites:

<http://f-marc.com/11plus/home> - information on FIFA 11+ and other soccer-specific injury prevention issues

<http://www.stopsportsinjuries.org> - much of the information for this article was obtained from this website