

COMMON INJURIES

Common injuries seldom receive prompt care because of what they are — common.

There's a tendency to "walk-off" sprained ankles or "work through" muscle bruises and cramps. These conditions are often mishandled; or even worse, they're ignored until they turn into chronic conditions, which can ruin performance and enjoyment of an activity.

Many Injuries Can Be Prevented

Knowing what to do when you're injured is not enough. Learn how to prevent injuries. Warm up each and every time you work out. Wear appropriate protective gear. Eat the kind of diet that will give you enough fluids, energy and minerals to sustain you during intense exercise.

Stay in condition for the activities you'll be undertaking and rest and recover between workouts. Be extremely cautious about returning to play too soon after an injury because you could suffer a more serious injury the second time around.

First Aid: Rest+Ice + Compression + Elevation = R.I.C.E.

For most injuries, the best immediate treatment method is rest, ice, compression and elevation, easily remembered by the acronym R.I.C.E.

When you hurt yourself, stop, rest and apply ice to the affected area. For compression, wrap a bandage or towel around the injured area. Elevate the injury above the heart. Reapply ice for 10-15 minute sessions, three to four times a day.

These steps can save you a lot of pain and speed up your recovery. If there is any chance of a serious condition like a severe sprain, fracture, internal bleeding or concussion, or if pain persists, see a physician for a professional diagnosis and treatment.

Muscle Cramps

Muscle cramps are a particular problem in hot, muggy weather. They occur when body fluids and certain minerals are depleted. Overexertion can also lead to this condition.

Moving to higher levels of conditioning, working too hard or too fast without enough preparation or rest can also cause problems. Inadequate stretching and warm-ups are other factors which may influence the condition.

Prevention: Make sure you're getting enough salt (through your diet, not salt pills), magnesium, potassium and fluids. Drink plenty of water before, during and after all workouts.

Always warm up well, with light exercise and thorough stretching before beginning any intense activity.

Treatment: Don't try to play or exercise through muscle cramps. Stop immediately, do some easy stretching and drink lots of water. Receive gentle massage, if possible.

Tips: If cramps are a persistent problem, consult a nutritionist. Try eating more fresh fruits, vegetables and grains to replace minerals you've lost through perspiration. Force yourself to pre-hydrate, drinking lots of fluids before your workouts, as well as during exercise and after finishing. Bananas are recommended to replace potassium. Try to schedule your workouts during the coolest parts of the day, wearing minimal, light colored and "breathe-easy" fabrics or move to cooler locations indoors.

Bruised Muscles

Bruised muscles are one of the most common sports injuries. They are almost unavoidable in team sports with all of the bodies flying into one another. Bruised muscles are caused by impact that breaks blood vessels within the muscle. Large muscles in the legs or upper arms can bleed quite heavily. Ice is critical to control swelling, relieve pain, prevent tightness and reduce recovery time.

Prevention: Wear padding over commonly injured areas and particularly to previously bruised muscles.

Treatment: Along with the R.I.C.E. procedure, gentle stretching will help you to regain full range of motion. Stretching can break up adhesions which may have formed and can speed-up your return to play.

Tips: Although bruised muscles generally are not serious, take care with deep bruises in the thigh region. The area can calcify, causing major problems. If discomfort persists beyond a couple of weeks, see a physician for a thorough examination, perhaps including X-rays to eliminate the possibility of calcification.

Muscle Strains, Pulls and Tears

Muscles are naturally stiff and tight, without much elasticity. When muscles are stretched too far, too suddenly, they can be strained or pulled. In extreme cases, muscle tissue actually tears, causing intense pain and muscle spasms.

Many factors contribute to muscle injuries. Poor flexibility, inadequate warm-ups, muscle fatigue due to lack of conditioning and potassium or magnesium deficiency are frequently to blame. Skeletal irregularities such as unequal leg length, flat feet or curvature of the spine make some athletes more prone to muscle problems.

Prevention: Many muscle pulls are preventable. Tight, short muscles are much more susceptible to injury, so work hard to improve flexibility. Always stretch and warm-up

thoroughly before any exercise. Work and play within your limits. Going at something too hard, too fast can overload muscles. Orthotic devices can help compensate for unequal leg length or flat feet. If you have special physical problems, consult a physician.

Treatment: As soon as you feel a twinge, stop the activity and start the R.I.C.E. treatment. Stretch very gently and carefully so as not to push yourself into a more severe injury.

Tips: Since there is such a tremendous range in muscle injuries, each must be treated differently. Take these injuries seriously. Seek experienced sports medicine guidance for an accurate diagnosis, followed by the right medication, treatment and rehabilitation.

Sprains

Sprains are injuries to ligaments, the tissues that connect bone to bone within the joints. Sprains are caused by abnormal stress in a normal direction, like a hyper-extended elbow; or by abnormal stress in an abnormal direction, like medial and lateral knees injuries, or sprained ankles.

Sprains vary in severity. In mild, first degree sprains, some fibers of a ligament have been torn, but there is no actual functional loss. In moderate, second degree sprains, some portion of the ligament is torn and there is some functional loss. Severe, third degree sprains involve complete loss of function due to a force that either tears the ligament from one of its attachments or pulls it apart somewhere within its substance. Does this sound like something you should walk-off and push through? Absolutely not.

Prevention: When you train for a sport, don't just build muscles and cardiovascular conditioning. Perform drills that improve balance and prepare you for quick stops, starts and turns. Use good, sound techniques on all skills.

Treatment: Sprains can be very serious. They require medical attention. If you suffer any injury to a joint, stop immediately, put ice on the area and get to a physician. Treatment will vary according to the severity of your sprain, but professional guidance can make a huge difference in getting back to full-speed activity and avoiding a serious, chronic condition.