

Smart Play, Keep Injury Away!

To expect the unexpected

Injury has been shown to most adults as a significant barrier to regular participation in physical activity. There are many different causes for sport injury, ranging from internal factors of the fitness and skills of the exercisers to external factors such as safety of playground and appropriateness of the training programme. Although some injuries are accidents, most of them are predictable and preventable. Whether you are a serious athlete training 5 days per week, or you are an amateur exercising just occasionally for fun in leisure time, there are always some precautions that you must take to prevent injury.

Tips on prevention of injury

Warm up and cool down adequately: Depending on the nature and strenuousness of your sports, a complete warm-up session can be finished in 10 to 20 minutes. Such a session should cover three components: 1) low-to-moderate aerobic exercise (e.g. jogging) to raise body temperature; 2) sport-specific stretching for major muscles to be used, and 3) sport-specific drills that simulate similar movements of subsequent performance (e.g. high-kicking for footballers). Don't forget the cool-down part, which is basically the reverse of warm-up; it can help you loosen up tense muscles, and hence speed up your recovery and get you ready for a next workout.

Increase exercise amount gradually: It is always good if you want to work out more. However, never rocket your training volume too much too soon; otherwise you will be pushed beyond limits, thereby resulting in injury. Try to follow the "10% rule" – increase by no more than 10% of the total amount of exercise (e.g. running or biking distance or duration) per week, and back off by 10% for every third or fourth week of training to allow adequate recovery.

Learn proper sports skills and technique: Chronic injury can be induced by repetitively making some improper movements that pose excessive stress to joints. As for precaution, for example, avoid bending knees greater than 90 degrees if you squat. Keep knees in line with toes at all times for landing, and avoid doing "knee-in, toe-out" movement, which may pose traumatic injury to your knees.

Listen to your body: Pain and discomfort can be warning signals to indicate injury. There is no reason to “work through” the pain because of the belief of “no pain, no gain”. Stop exercising if you feel unwell or any muscle and joint pain, and; that may save you from further harm or even injury. Besides, avoid exercising when you are tired or out of shape.

Make sensible choices: Always consider the activity with respect to your age, fitness, skills and experience. For example, you are at higher risk of injury if you are going to join a marathon race in 3 months whereas now you are just able to finish a 5 km run at a time. Also, competitive and contact sports (e.g. football and basketball) are more likely to impose injury to exercisers; if you want to embark on those events, train relevant skills and increase fitness beforehand.

Most sport injuries can be prevented. To achieve this, we have to understand our physical conditions, find out the chances of injury and keep safe when working out. That’s how we can maximise the benefits of sports.