

TEAMtalk:

Injury Prevention & Avoidance

1) WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO AVOID INJURY WHEN EXERCISING?

- Prevention is always better than cure. For example, if you sustain a musculoskeletal injury such as an ankle sprain or stress fracture, your risk of developing subsequent ankle sprains or stress fractures increases just from having that prior injury acting as a risk factor.

2) WHAT ARE THE COMMON WAYS TO INJURE YOURSELF DURING EXERCISE?

- This is dependent on the activity. For example, the common injuries seen in a sport such as rugby (where there may be multiple tackles during training giving rise to contact trauma) would be different from another sport like running or cycling (where there is often an element of overuse).
- It is useful to consider risk factors and they are often classified as 'intrinsic' (risk factors occurring within the athlete themselves) or 'extrinsic' (risk factors occurring outwith of the athlete, for example changes in the weather or environment). Intrinsic risk factors can include muscle weakness, inefficient movement patterns, reduced flexibility and proprioception; extrinsic risk factors can be due to direct contact, training surface and training errors.

3) HOW CAN INJURY BE AVOIDED?

START A FITNESS PLAN GRADUALLY:

- This is a good way to go about things. It allows people the opportunity to test out aspects of a fitness plan that may or may not suit them, before deciding if they wish to continue or modify that aspect. It also allows for training errors to be picked up early on before a person sustains an injury from overdoing things.

DON'T OVERTRAIN:

- Without realising it, many people adopt a 'boom or bust' approach. They decide to do a new activity, let their enthusiasm get the better of them and overdo things (boom), then have to stop abruptly when they sustain an injury (bust) and this cycle then often repeats. If this injury is significant, it may mean weeks or months of lost training time, resulting in a loss of general fitness.

WEAR THE RIGHT KIT (TRAINERS ETC):

- With sports clothing, this can ensure you do not overheat in hot weather and conversely, do not suffer from hypothermia in colder weather.
- With trainers and footwear, this can play a role preventing the tendons (as seen in Achilles tendinopathy) and bones from being overloaded. Stress fractures in the lower leg and feet (tibia, fibula and metatarsals) are some of the most common bone stress injuries seen in a sports medicine clinic.

FOCUS ON YOUR FORM:

- This is easier at the start of your exercise but as you become more fatigued, your form may start to go.

STAY HYDRATED:

- It is easy to become dehydrated in cold weather before you start to experience thirst.

- In addition to losing water, you also lose electrolytes such as sodium, potassium and magnesium. These are essential for the normal functions of your body.
- Becoming dehydrated may affect your concentration and make you more prone to training errors. This may increase your likelihood of sustaining an injury.

WARM UP/ COOL-DOWN:

- There is ongoing debate in the scientific literature as to whether warming up prior to a game actually reduces the likelihood of physical injury. What is more readily accepted is that it likely contributes to both a mental and physical readiness to participate- this gives rise to multiple secondary benefits from a performance perspective.

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY:

- Physical activity and sport is universally good for everyone- however, we are all individuals with different loading and injury thresholds unique to our own bodies. It is therefore vital to listen to your body, especially if symptoms persist or worsen with particular activities. There may be merit in reducing the activity load (or stopping completely if symptoms persist despite the reduction in load).

4) WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO DIAGNOSE AND TREAT SPORTS INJURIES?

- If you are in doubt or concerned, it is worth you consulting with a qualified health profession, for example a sports physician or physiotherapist, to get more detailed advice. A detailed history (the background and story of how you got your injury) will often give many clues as to what the underlying issue is. Imaging investigations (for example x-rays, ultrasound and MRI scans) and blood tests are often very helpful to then confirm the diagnosis.
- Once the diagnosis is clear, it then becomes much easier to formulate a treatment plan.

5) HOW CAN THESE EVERYDAY ACTIVITIES ALSO CAUSE PHYSICAL INJURY?

CHORES:

- Good form and safety is important not just in sport and exercise, but also when carrying out chores and DIY. For example, lifting a heavy laundry basket repeatedly with poor form may give rise to lower back symptoms; repeated use of a non-motorised screw driver may cause pain in the hand, forearm and elbow.

WORKING FROM HOME:

- With the Covid-19 pandemic, more people than ever are working from home. However, their desk set up may be less than ideal (for example, if they work from the kitchen table or sit on a hard chair) and this can give risk to various musculoskeletal ailments.
- Working from home also means the divide between home and work life is less clear, leading to many home office workers sitting for longer at their desks (and conversely exercising less), with resulting overuse injuries.

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