

Injury prevention

Minor sports injuries do not discriminate. Even if players heed every little piece of health and safety advice, they will invariably still experience minor injuries such as cuts, sprains, bruises and blisters. Such injuries are unavoidable in the world of sport.

However, most serious sports injuries are definitely avoidable. Injuries that incapacitate athletes and prevent them from playing a sport are too common, but can generally be stopped with proper injury prevention programmes that should be part of any team's exercise routine.

As the owner or manager of a sports entity, you have a legal obligation to help shield players and employees from work-related illness or injury. Use these tips to keep your players on the pitch all season long.

Causes of sports injuries

Sports injuries happen for a variety of reasons—particularly accidents, lack of proper warm-up, poor technique or overtraining. Generally, sports injuries fall into these two categories:

- **Sudden injuries** - the result of a single impact, awkward movement or accident.
- **Overuse injuries** - develop over time due to poor technique or repeatedly overusing certain parts of the body.

Sometimes sports injuries are so imperceptible that, by the time the pain becomes intolerable, the injury has caused lasting damage. Therefore, players should stop exercising if they feel pain, regardless of whether the pain is sudden or chronic. Exercising while injured can cause further damage and significantly lengthen recovery time.



Treating Sports Injuries

Players can treat most minor sports injuries themselves. Instruct athletes to rest the affected body part and use over-the-counter painkillers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, to relieve pain.

Other more serious injuries, such as broken bones or damaged cartilage, require specialist guidance. Make sure your sports entity can access a preferred sports medicine doctor and has an emergency plan in place to deal with sudden, major injuries.

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Creating an Injury Prevention Programme

A comprehensive injury prevention programme, integrated into all aspects of a sports entity's guidelines, can greatly reduce your athletes' accidents and injuries. Although not exhaustive, consider the following list of precautions as a solid foundation for any successful injury prevention programme:

- **Warm up before exercise.** Warming up helps physically prepare your body for exercise. Try light jogging or stretching for 15 minutes—you should start to sweat but not feel tired.
- **Stretch before and after exercise.** Poor flexibility is a common culprit in many sports injuries. Stretching before and after keeps your body limber.
- **Purchase proper footwear.** Running with inappropriate footwear can wreak havoc on your feet. Get help from a specialist or retailer to find footwear that fits your feet and matches the sport you play.
- **Practise good technique.** Regular exercise can actually be harmful without following proper technique. Avoid overuse injuries by always practising good technique when exercising or playing sport.
- **Listen to your body.** Know your body's limit. If you start to feel pain, stop exercising. Continuing to do so could cause permanent damage.
- **Drink lots of water.** Exercising drains your body's fluids. Replace them by drinking lots of water.
- **Eat nutritious food.** To expedite your recovery, eat healthy, nutritious meals before and after exercising.
- **Incorporate rest days** into your exercise schedule. Exercising every day overexerts your body. Schedule days with little to no exercise to give your body a chance to recover. Alternate which muscle groups you train each day to avoid overuse injuries.
- **Take ice baths to reduce swelling.** Although the evidence is inconclusive, some athletes find taking ice baths after workouts helps reduce swelling and speed recovery.
- **Receive regular sports massages.** Regular massages by a sports masseur can help with recovery by increasing the body's blood and oxygen flow.



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0035-0918

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