



Preventing Sports Injuries

Sports injuries can happen because of poor conditioning, trauma, or muscle overuse. Before you begin playing a sport, it's important to start and maintain a basic fitness routine. Once you are fit, you can withstand the often unexpected demands on the body that come with playing sports. To avoid overusing your muscles, take frequent breaks. Or take some time off from your chosen activity and try a different one.

One very important point: Before beginning a new exercise program, talk with your doctor. This is especially important if you are over the age of 40 or have any chronic medical problems, such as heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis.

Tips for preventing sports injuries

1. Warm up and cool down with slow, gentle activities, such as walking or the treadmill. Save stretching for your cool-down period. Never bounce when you're stretching, such as rapid toe-touching. Movements like this can cause injury.
2. Build up gradually until you reach the length and intensity of exercise you're aiming for. Don't try to get there overnight. And take the time to learn the right techniques, such as how to hit a golf ball or block a spike in volleyball.
3. Be sure you have the right equipment. And use it correctly. Wear supportive, well-cushioned shoes for running, aerobic dancing, and walking. Always use helmets and protective gear for football, bike riding, and rollerblading. Make sure that you adjust your bicycle seat and handlebars to fit your body.
4. Change your activities so that you use different muscle groups. For example, alternate days of walking with biking, aerobic dancing, or swimming. This is called cross-training.
5. If your only chance to exercise regularly is in the early morning or evening when it's dark outside, make sure to play it safe. Runners, walkers, cyclists, and rollerbladers who use the streets should have fluorescent patches on their clothing and equipment and should obey the rules of the road. Also, stay aware of what's happening around you. Digital music devices such as iPods may drown out other sounds that might alert you to danger. Use them with caution. Consider working out inside when it's dark outside.

Treating injuries

“No pain, no gain” is a myth. You don't need to have pain to become fit. Rest when you're tired or hurt. While you are healing, try another activity that doesn't stress the injured area. Resume your regular activity slowly and build up only when you are free of pain.

Also, if you've strained or sprained a muscle, ligament, tendon, or bone, use the R.I.C.E. treatment:

- **Rest** – the injured area for at least 24 to 48 hours.
- **Ice** – apply ice or cold packs for 10 minutes several times a day for the first 72 hours.
- **Compression** – wrap the injury with an Ace bandage to help with swelling, but not too tightly.
- **Elevation** – elevate the injured area on pillows whenever you're sitting or lying down.

Although a little muscle soreness is OK, pain in or near the joints is never a good sign. If you experience sharp pain, or pain in the joints or tendons that doesn't get better within 3 days of the R.I.C.E. treatment, call your health care professional.

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Other resources

- Connect to our Web site at kp.org to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor.