

## **Ankle Injuries in the Soccer Athlete**

*Information provided by Nirschl Orthopaedic Center and Virginia Sportsmedicine Institute*

Soccer is hard on your feet! Injuries to the foot and ankle can occur from running, cutting, sliding or tackling, and from striking the ball or another player with the foot.

Ankle sprains are one of the most common injuries in youth soccer. Researchers have estimated that ankle injuries account for 10 to 30% of all sports related injuries in young athletes and from 16 to 29% of all soccer specific injuries.

Ankle injuries can be difficult to diagnosis. Once a proper diagnosis is made, one must follow the correct treatment plan. Injuries to the ankle range from low grade ankle sprains, to damaged cartilage and fractures. Once the ankle has been injured, it is highly likely that the ankle will be injured again over the course of the athlete's sporting career. The best chance to prevent these injuries from reoccurring is a focused and sport-specific rehabilitation program to reestablish ankle strength and stability.

Ankle injuries often occur from a contact injury during the game of soccer. If the athlete is able to walk after the injury, then a low grade sprain is suspected. If, however, the athlete is unable to walk after the injury, then you should see a physician to rule out a broken bone or high grade ankle sprain.

### **Ankle Sprains**

**Grade I injury** – involves stretching of the outside ligament (ATFL) without tearing or instability, able to walk, pain usually only on outside of ankle

**Grade II injury** – involves the complete tear of the ligament (ATFL) and partial tear of another ligament (CFL), slight instability, and difficulty bearing weight, pain located outside of ankle

**Grade III injury** – involves tearing of both ligaments (ATFL, CFL), instability, inability to weight bear

**High Ankle Sprains** – usually involves injury to the ligaments that connect the bones above the ankle joint, great instability, inability to bear weight. Pain located inside and outside of the ankle

### **Contusions**

**Bone bruises** result from high impact, such as in slide tackling

Initial treatment should include the pneumatic" **POLICE**

- **Protection** of the injured joint by bracing or splinting and by not engaging in activities that increase the pain
- **Optimal Loading** by putting some weight through the leg as tolerated
- **Ice** applied for 1—20 minutes every 1-2 hours, at regular intervals to reduce swelling
- **Compression** – pressure applied in conjunction with ice
- **Elevation** – with the injured joint elevated above the level of the heart for the first 30-72 hours after the injury whenever possible to prevent the pooling of blood at the point of injury

While ankle injuries are very common in soccer, proper care and rehabilitation can ensure that a player returns to form as quickly as possible. Treatment for ankle sprains and injuries depends on the severity of the injury. Most athletes can return to play when they have no pain and are able to run without a limp. Bracing can help the athlete initially during the recovery period to aid in stability, however, rehabilitation and strength training of

the ankle remains the most beneficial. A point-specific ankle rehabilitation program remains the single most successful treatment option for return to competitive sport.

Nirschl Orthopaedic Center is a leader in sports medicine and general orthopedic services. In addition Virginia Sportsmedicine Institute physical therapy has been rated one of the top sports medicine clinics in the area. If you have an orthopaedic injury, schedule an appointment with one of our doctors today by calling our Arlington, VA location at (703) 525-2200. Visit our websites at [www.nirschl.com](http://www.nirschl.com) and [www.vasportsmedicine.com](http://www.vasportsmedicine.com) to learn more about our services. For more info on orthopaedic issues visit our blog at [www.nirschlorthopaedic.com](http://www.nirschlorthopaedic.com)