

Sports Tips for Preventing Injuries in Soccer

Information provided by Nirschl Orthopaedic Center, Virginia Sportsmedicine Institute and Stop Sports Injuries

Soccer is one of the most popular sports in the world and the fastest growing team sport in the United States. Soccer injuries are generally defined as either cumulative (overuse) or acute (traumatic) injuries. Overuse injuries occur over time due to stress on the muscles, joints and soft tissues without proper time for healing. They begin as a small, nagging ache or pain, and can grow into a debilitating injury if they aren't treated correctly. Acute or traumatic injuries occur due to a sudden force, or impact, and can be quite dramatic.

So what can you do to help prevent soccer injuries?

- Have a pre-season physical examination and follow your doctor's recommendations
- Use well-fitting cleats and shin guards. There is some evidence that there is a higher rate of knee injuries with bladed square cleats vs. studded rounded cleats due to the increased traction and decreased rotational component of square cleats. At Virginia Sportsmedicine Institute, the physical therapy clinic, at Nirschl Orthopaedic Center, we have observed that the lack of arch support in soccer shoes can lead to an increased risk of ACL tears. We, therefore recommend athletes, especially females, get over the counter insoles called Super Feet Black in the low profile design that will fit better in to soccer cleats.
- Be aware of poor field conditions that can increase the risk of injuries.
- Use properly sized synthetic balls – leather balls that become waterlogged and heavy are more dangerous, especially when heading.
- Watch out for mobile goals that can fall on players. Request fixed goals whenever possible.
- Hydrate adequately. Waiting until you are thirsty is often too late to hydrate properly. Make an effort to increase hydration the night before, as well as after practices and games.
- Pay attention to environmental conditions, especially in relation to excessively hot and humid weather, to help avoid heat illness. Make sure the coaches are providing adequate breaks in hot weather.
- Maintain proper fitness. Injury rates are higher in athletes who have not adequately prepared physically. It is important to get in shape to play your sport not play your sport to get in shape.
- After a period of inactivity, progress gradually back to full-contact soccer through activities such as aerobic conditioning, strength training, and agility training.
- Avoid overuse injuries. More is not always better; many sports medicine specialists believe that it is beneficial to take at least one season off each year to reduce the risk of injury and help avoid “burn-out”. Try to avoid the pressure to over train that is now exerted on many young athletes. Listen to your body and decrease training time and intensity if pain or discomfort develops. Do not allow your athletes to play with pain!
- Speak with a sports medicine professional who treats soccer players if you have any concerns about injuries or prevention strategies

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 and www.vasportsmedicine.com to learn more about our services. For more info on orthopaedic issues visit our blog at www.nirschlorthopaedic.com