



## What are they?

### Points To Remember About Sports Injuries

- There are two kinds of sports injuries. Acute injuries happen suddenly, such as sprained ankles. Chronic injuries happen after you play a sport or exercise over a long period of time.
- Sports injuries are first treated with R-I-C-E: Rest, Ice, Compression (pressure on the injury), and Elevation (raise the injured area above the heart).
- Doctors will treat more serious injuries with medications, by limiting movement, or by recommending surgery, physical therapy, and rest.
- You can prevent many kinds of sports injuries by following safe exercise habits.

Sports injuries are injuries that happen when playing sports or exercising. There are two kinds of sports injuries:

- Acute injuries occur suddenly when playing or exercising. For example:
  - Sprained ankles.
  - Strained backs.
  - Broken bones.
- Chronic injuries happen after you play a sport or exercise for a long time.

## Who gets them?

Anyone can get a sports injury.

## What are the types?

The most common sports injuries are:

- Muscle [sprains and strains](#).
- [Knee injuries](#).
- Achilles tendon injuries.
- Pain along the shin bone.
- Fractures.
- Dislocations.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of a sports injury will depend on the type of injury you have.

Symptoms of an acute injury include:

- Sudden, severe pain.
- Swelling.
- Not being able to place weight on a leg, knee, ankle, or foot.
- An arm, elbow, wrist, hand, or finger that is very tender.
- Not being able to move a joint as normal.
- Extreme leg or arm weakness.
- A bone or joint that is visibly out of place.

Symptoms of a chronic injury include:

- Pain when you play.
- Pain when you exercise.
- A dull ache when you rest.
- Swelling.

## What causes them?

The cause of sports injuries can include:

- Accidents.
- Poor training practices.
- Improper gear.
- Being out of condition.
- Not warming up or stretching before you play or exercise.

## How are they treated?

Doctors first treat sports injuries with R-I-C-E (**R**est, **I**ce, **C**ompression, and **E**levation).

- **Rest.** Decrease your regular activities and rest the injured area.
- **Ice.** Put an ice pack on the injury for 20 minutes, four to eight times per day. You can use a:
  - Cold pack.
  - Ice bag.
  - Plastic bag filled with crushed ice and wrapped in a towel.
- **Compression.** Put even pressure on the painful area to help reduce the swelling.
- **Elevation.** Put the injured area on a pillow at a level above your heart.

Your doctor may recommend other things to treat your sports injury.

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin or ibuprofen, can help decrease swelling and pain.
- Immobilization is a common treatment for sports injuries. It keeps you from moving the injured area and prevents more damage. To limit movement of your injured area, your doctor may recommend using a:
  - Sling.
  - Splint.
  - Cast.
  - Leg immobilizer.
- Surgery, in some cases, is needed to fix sports injuries. Surgery can fix torn tendons and ligaments or put broken bones back in place. Most sports injuries don't need surgery.
- Rehabilitation is a key part of treatment. It involves step-by-step exercises that get the injured area back to normal. Rehabilitation may include the following tips:
  - Moving the injured area helps it to heal. The sooner this is done, the better. Exercises start by gently moving the injured body part through a range of motions.
  - The next step is to stretch. After a while, weights may be used to strengthen the injured area.
  - As injury heals, scar tissue forms. After a while, the scar tissue shrinks. This shrinking brings the injured tissues back together. When this happens, the injured area becomes tight or stiff. This is when you are at greatest risk of injuring the area again. You should stretch the muscles every day. You should always stretch as a warmup before you play or exercise.

- Don't play your sport until you are sure you can stretch the injured area without pain, swelling, or stiffness. When you start playing again, start slowly. Build up slowly to full speed.
- Rest after an injury is an important part of the healing process. Your doctor can guide you on the proper balance between rest and rehabilitation.
- Other therapies your doctor may recommend include:
  - Electrostimulation, which gives you mild electric shocks.
  - Cold packs.
  - Heat packs.
  - Ultrasound or sound waves.
  - Massage.

## Who treats them?

If you have a severe injury, you need to be seen immediately in an emergency room. Many other sports injuries can be evaluated and treated by your primary doctor.

You may also see:

- An orthopaedic surgeon, a doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating injuries to bones, joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles, and nerves.
- A physical therapist or physiotherapist, a health care professional who can help you:
  - Develop a rehabilitation program.
  - Strengthen muscles and joints.
  - Prevent further injury.

## Can I prevent them?

These tips can help you avoid sports injuries:

- Don't bend your knees more than halfway when doing knee bends.
- Don't twist your knees when you stretch. Keep your feet as flat as you can.
- When jumping, land with your knees bent.
- Do warmup exercises before you play any sport.
- Always stretch before you play or exercise.
- Don't overdo it.
- Cool down after hard sports or workouts.
- Wear shoes that fit properly, are stable, and absorb shock.
- Use the softest exercise surface you can find; don't run on asphalt or concrete.
- Run on flat surfaces.

For adults:

- Don't be a "weekend warrior." Don't try to do a week's worth of activity in a day or two.

- Learn to do your sport right. Use proper form to reduce your risk of “overuse” injuries.
- Use safety gear.
- Know your body’s limits.
- Build up your exercise level gradually.
- Strive for a total body workout of cardiovascular, strength training, and flexibility exercises.

For parents and coaches:

- Group children by their skill level and body size, not by their age, especially for contact sports.
- Match the child to the sport. Don’t push the child too hard to play a sport that she or he may not like or be able to do.
- Try to find sports programs that have certified athletic trainers.
- See that all children get a physical exam before playing.
- Don’t play a child who is injured.
- Get the child to a doctor, if needed.
- Provide a safe environment for sports.

For children:

- Be in proper condition to play the sport.
- Get a physical exam before you start playing sports.
- Follow the rules of the game.
- Wear gear that protects, fits well, and is right for the sport.
- Know how to use athletic gear.
- Don’t play when you are very tired or in pain.
- Always warm up before you play.
- Always cool down after you play.

## For More Info

### **U.S. Food and Drug Administration**

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

[Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. [Drugs@FDA](https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf) is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics**

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

### **American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons**

Website: <http://www.aaos.org>

**American Academy of Pediatrics**

Website: <http://www.aap.org>

**American College of Sports Medicine**

Website: <http://www.acsm.org>

**American Medical Society for Sports Medicine**

Website: <http://www.amssm.org>

**American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine**

Website: <http://www.sportsmed.org>

**American Physical Therapy Association**

Website: <http://www.apta.org>

**National Athletic Trainers Association**

Website: <http://www.nata.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at [NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov](mailto:NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov).

- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)

**Related Information**

[La historia de Ana: Cómo ella y su familia aprendieron sobre las lesiones depor...](#)

[Ana's Story](#)

[Lesiones deportivas: Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura](#)

**View/Download/Order Publications**

[Sports Injuries, Easy-to-Read Fast Facts](#)

[Preventing Musculoskeletal Sports Injuries in Youth: A Guide for Parents](#)

[Sports Injuries, Handout on Health](#)

[Sprains and Strains, Questions and Answers about](#)

[Bursitis and Tendinitis, Questions and Answers about](#)