



# Injury Prevention Tips



Special Olympics

**Health**

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Injuries can hinder performance, reduce physical activity, lead to fear and anxiety, reduce motivation, and in some instances, end an athlete's career in sport. Although they are sometimes unavoidable, much can be done to decrease an athlete's risk of sport-related injury. Proper sports training, physical conditioning, and leading a healthy, active lifestyle can help athletes to stay injury free so that they can perform optimally.

## Common Sport-Related Injuries

There are a variety of common sports injuries that range in severity from minor to major, and can result in loss of sporting time. These injuries may be classified as *acute*, meaning that they happen suddenly from a single traumatic event, or as *chronic*, meaning that they develop over time and result from overuse. Below is a list of injuries and illnesses that are commonly reported across many sports:

- Cuts
- Blisters
- Bruises
- Sprains
- Strains
- Fractured or Broken Bones
- Heat Illness
- Dehydration
- Concussion
- Overuse injuries



## Injury Prevention Tips

- Check athlete attire and equipment to ensure proper size, fit, comfort and quality.
- Repeatedly teach and correct athlete's technique since poor form can lead to chronic injuries.
- Remind athletes and provide opportunities to stay hydrated – encourage water before practice, bringing a full water bottle to practice, taking water breaks during practice and drinking water after practice and throughout the week.
- Encourage balanced nutrition to ensure athletes get nutrients that help maintain and healthy weight, reduce strain on joints, prevent cramping, dehydration and aid performance and recovery.
- Incorporate proper warm-up and cool-down activities into training sessions and games:
  - Warm-ups should include aerobic activities and *dynamic stretching* (stretching while moving). Evidence shows that *static stretching* (stationary stretching) decreases performance and increases risk of injuries.
  - Cool-downs should gradually decrease the intensity of the activity and set the stage for recovery. This is an ideal time for *static stretches*.



# Injury Prevention Tips

- Add physical conditioning activities into practice to promote health-related fitness. For additional ideas, use the [Fitness Cards](#).



- ***Endurance:*** Endurance exercise help athletes sustain energy/stamina for longer length of time. Fatigue near the end of the practice, training or competition can lead to improper form, mistakes, and even loss of focus which are common reasons for injury.
- ***Strength:*** Strength training can increase stability around joints and increase bone density helping prevent strains, sprains, and broken bones.
- ***Flexibility:*** Stretching can improve range of motion around commonly used joints and help prevent muscle strains. *Keep in mind many people with Down syndrome have very flexible joints and muscles.*
- ***Balance:*** Balance exercises can reduce the risk of falls, preventing many different acute injuries.
- ***Speed/Agility/Power:*** Training individual components of fitness like these provide opportunities to break down movement patterns and more easily correct form.
- Ensure that the intensity of training activities is appropriate for the fitness level and experience of athletes. While athletes should be encouraged to engage in moderate and vigorous activities, be cautious and aware of overexertion in athletes especially those that have low physical fitness.
- Encourage athletes to focus on fitness outside of practice and in the off-season. The [Fit 5 Guide](#) is a resources that teach athletes the importance of fitness as it relates to sport.
- Promote other healthy lifestyle choices such as staying tobacco free, reducing sedentary time like watching TV, having a positive mindset, and getting adequate sleep every night.
- Research common injuries in your sport. A quick search on your sport federation’s website might provide a list of common injuries and simple exercises you can incorporate into training sessions to avoid them.
- Remind athletes to notify you when something hurts or is uncomfortable. Pass along information to families so that they can follow up with a healthcare provider as needed. Dealing with an injury early on decreases the likelihood of a long recovery.
- Ensure your athletes are seeking appropriate treatment if they do have an injury.
  - Consider finding a volunteer certified Athletic Trainer to join your coaching staff to assist in case injuries occur.

Injuries will happen in sports. Integrating fitness on and off the field of play will minimize severity when injuries occur and help athletes recover and return to play. If an athlete is injured, it is important that they receive medical treatment and are slowly re-introduced once given medical clearance.