

PREVENTING FITNESS INJURIES

PREPARE WELL AND HELP PREVENT INJURY DURING ACTIVITY

Doing regular exercise is essential for good health, but whether you're training, ocean swimming or running in an event, you don't want an injury to stop you in your tracks.

WARM UP

Whatever activity you're planning to do, it pays to warm up first. Cold muscles are more likely to be injured — by increasing circulation to the muscles, a warm up can help prevent injury.

How you warm up depends on the activity you're doing — the idea is to warm up the major muscles you'll be using by doing some light exercise. If you're running or jogging, Sports Medicine Australia's injury prevention program Smartplay suggests a two to three minute brisk walk or jog which raises a light sweat to warm up your leg muscles before you step up the pace. If your activity includes using your upper body, you need to warm up those muscles too.

WHAT ABOUT STRETCHING — DOES IT HELP PREVENT INJURY?

Not necessarily. Although stretching before and after a workout is often recommended to prevent injury, Australian research suggests that although it may help prevent muscle soreness after exercise, stretching doesn't significantly reduce injury risk. But it's still worth stretching warm muscles after exercise. A five to ten minute stretching session emphasising the major groups of muscles you have just used can help your body get rid of muscle waste products and help reduce soreness and stiffness.

WEAR THE RIGHT GEAR

The right footwear for your activity is important. Shoes need to provide stability and support. If the activity involves high-impact movement, shoes need to cushion this impact. If your activity requires equipment such as a helmet or mouthguard, they need to be fitted properly and be in good condition.

MIX UP YOUR FITNESS ACTIVITIES

Adding variety to your fitness routine (also known as cross training) can help prevent overuse injuries caused by doing the same movements over and over again. Vary a routine of jogging by cycling or swimming, for example. Or include some strength training sessions into your routine. This has two advantages — it varies your activities and also helps prevent injury by improving muscle strength. Strengthening the leg muscles that help support the knee can help prevent knee injuries, for instance.

GET THE RIGHT TECHNIQUE

Inexperience or doing movements incorrectly ('poor form' as the experts call it) is another cause of injury. Advice from a qualified coach can help ensure correct technique.

SEE YOUR DOCTOR

Before starting an exercise program, if you're pregnant, lead a mostly inactive lifestyle, overweight, have heart disease or a family history of heart disease or have any health or musculoskeletal problems you should check with your doctor to make sure the activity is appropriate for you.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bupa health information
www.bupa.com.au/health

Smartplay
www.smartplay.com.au

Sources:

Better Health Channel. (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

Bracko MR. Knowing risks often prevents serious sporting injuries. ACSM Fit Society Page. Summer 2001: 6.

Jamtvedt G Herbert RD Flottorp S et al. A pragmatic randomised trial of stretching before and after physical activity to prevent injury and soreness. British Journal of Sports Medicine. 2009; doi:10.1136/bjism.2009.062232

Mayo Clinic. (www.mayoclinic.com)

Medline Plus. (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/sportsinjuries.html)

Smartplay. (www.smasa.asn.au/smartplay/)

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