



Sports injuries: Your top questions answered



Ankle sprains. Shin splints. Tennis elbow. These types of injuries can happen when playing sports or exercising. Some will require medical attention while others won't. We answer questions about what to do if you find yourself hurt.

This guide will help you understand types of sports injuries and what treatment options are available for immediate and long-term relief. We're here for you with the education, tools and expertise you need to live the active lifestyle you deserve, free from sports injuries.



1. What are sports injuries?

“Sports injuries” are injuries that happen when playing sports or exercising. Some are from accidents. Others can result from poor training practices or improper gear. Some people get injured when they are not in proper condition. Not warming up properly before you play or exercise can also lead to injuries. The most common sports injuries are:

- Sprains and strains
- Knee injuries
- Shoulder impingement or tendinitis
- Swollen muscles
- Achilles tendon injuries
- Pain along the shin bone
- Fractures
- Dislocations

2. What should you do if you get injured?

It’s not wise to “work through” the pain of a sports injury. Stop playing or exercising when you feel new or unusual pain. Playing or exercising through sports injuries typically only causes more harm. Some injuries should be seen by a doctor right away. Others you can treat yourself.

3. When should you call a doctor?

- The injury causes severe pain, swelling or numbness.
- You can’t put any weight on the area.
- An old injury hurts or aches.
- An old injury swells.
- The bone or joint doesn’t feel normal or feels unstable.

If you don’t have any of these signs, it may be safe to treat the injury at home. If the pain or other symptoms get worse, you should call your doctor.

4. How should you treat your injury?

Treatment often begins with the RICE method: rest, ice, compression and elevation.

Rest. Reduce your regular activities. If you've injured your foot, ankle or knee, take weight off of it. A crutch can help. If your right foot or ankle is injured, use the crutch on the left side. If your left foot or ankle is injured, use the crutch on the right side.

Ice. Put an ice pack to the injured area for 20 minutes, four to eight times a day. You can use a cold pack or ice bag. You can also use a plastic bag filled with crushed ice and wrapped in a towel. Take the ice off after 20 minutes to avoid cold injury.

Compression. Put even pressure (compression) on the injured area to help reduce swelling. You can use an elastic wrap, special boot, air cast or splint. Ask your doctor which one is best for your injury.

Elevation. Put the injured area on a pillow, at a level above your heart, to help reduce swelling.

5. What medication should you take?

Your doctor may suggest that you take a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug, or NSAID, such as aspirin or ibuprofen. These drugs reduce swelling and pain. You can buy them at a drug store. Another common drug is acetaminophen. It may relieve pain, but it will not reduce swelling.



6. What can people do to prevent sports injuries?

- Don't bend your knees more than half way 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 warm up with a light cardio routine.
- 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.

We can help

If you're experiencing pain, the experts at Novant Health Orthopedics & Sports Medicine are here to help. Using advanced diagnostic imaging and the latest treatment options, our team can develop a plan that's right for you. Don't spend another day living with pain — your healthy and active lifestyle is waiting for you.

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