Seven Common Sports Injuries

Here’s a list of the most common sports injuries, plus tips for injury-free exercises.

Runner’s Knee
About one-fourth of all problems treated by orthopedic surgeons involve the knee, according to the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. Torn ligaments and cartilage are the bulk of the problems, but runner’s knee is a loose heading for many aches and pains involving the kneecap.

Runner’s knee, which can strike cyclists, swimmers, basketball and volleyball players, step-aerobics fans, and runners, happens when the tendon below the kneecap becomes irritated from overuse or there is wear or arthritis under the kneecap. Women are especially vulnerable to ligament injuries and other knee disorders, with two to eight times the number of injuries found in male athletes.

- Replace worn-out shoes or insoles to help reduce impact. Switching from a hard to a soft running surface -- or from a hilly to a flat route -- also may relieve symptoms. Shoe inserts called orthotics, which lift your arches and help position your feet, may also help.
- To help hold your kneecap in line, strengthen your quadriceps, the front thigh muscles. Getting more rest and cross-training can also help prevent overusing one set of muscles.
- In bad cases of runner’s knee, take two days off and take anti-inflammatory medication, such as ibuprofen. After two days, be sure to warm up and cool down. Ice your knee for 20 minutes after the workout.
- Use weight machines to do leg extensions, concentrating on the last 30 degrees of the extension. Eight weeks of this exercise will keep runner’s knee pretty much under control.

Ankle sprain
What long-time basketball, volleyball, soccer, or hockey player or runner hasn’t twisted an ankle and torn a ligament or tendon? Ankle sprains account for one in five sports-related injuries, according to the American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society.

Strengthening exercises, such as heel lifts on stairs, can help prevent some sprains. Taping a weak ankle and wearing high-top boots and a lace-up ankle brace also may prevent injuries, but only some.

The ‘10 Percent’ Rule
A tried-and-true rule in sports medicine may help you avoid doing too much too soon.

The ‘10 percent rule’ says to increase the frequency, duration, and intensity of an activity by only 10 percent per week. So, if you start walking 10 miles the first week, you would walk no more than 11 miles the second week.
Treatment of ankle sprains involves RICE, an acronym for rest, ice, compression, and elevation. Place your ankle up on a chair while you ice it for 20 minutes, three times a day. Then wrap it with an elastic bandage and keep it elevated. Make sure your skin doesn’t freeze. It’s a good idea to X-ray the ankle to rule out possible fractures and chipped bones.

Rest should only be for about a day. A helpful exercise is to sit in a chair and cross their legs so the injured ankle is off the floor. With the big toe on the injured foot, trace imaginary letters from A to Z.

**Shinsplints**
The shin bone is the attachment site for muscles used to help raise the arch of the foot. Shinsplint injuries are felt as pain on the inner side of the middle third of the shin bone. Shinsplints can be caused by running or jumping on hard surfaces, wearing worn-out shoes, or increasing intensity too fast while training.

Shinsplints often occur in people who aren’t used to exercise, says Robert Nirschl. Wearing good shoes with solid arch support often solves the problem. Also, using the 10 percent rule mentioned above ensures that you don’t increase training too fast. Other ways to prevent and treat shinsplints include cross-training, ice, orthotics, anti-inflammatories, and strengthening and stretching of lower leg muscles.

**Pulled Muscle**
While you can tear any muscle tissue during exercise, the most common tears are to the hamstring, calf (especially in aging tennis players), and groin muscles. Most are caused by weakness, fatigue, inflexibility, or a hasty and improper warm-up.

‘On rainy days you see muscle pulls all the time,’ says sports physician Nicholas DiNubile. ‘Athletes don’t want to stretch in the rain, and they cut short their warm-ups.’

The hamstrings, the muscles in back of your thighs, go through a wide range of motion during running and are under great stress as they stretch out quickly in a long stride. When the hams pull, you may feel a painful pop and involuntarily grab the back of your thigh, which later can turn black and blue. You also may feel a gap in the muscle where the tear occurred.

RICE, anti-inflammatories, and gentle stretches are the best ways to treat muscle pulls. As the injury is healing, start a preventive program of gentle stretching and strengthening the muscle. Take time to warm up and cool down. Warm up means light activity until you break out in a slight sweat, and then stretching. Don’t worry if you’re not as flexible as your workout partner or teammates. The point of stretching is to help your muscles, not your ego.

**Low Back Pain**
The good news here is that low back pain is less prevalent among people who exercise regularly. It is a far more serious problem among overweight, sedentary people. Low back pain, however, is always lurking around the corner for golfers, tennis players, cyclists, joggers, and baseball and softball players.
Prevent Back Pain
This exercise builds the back extensor muscles (the long thin bands that run the length of the backbone and are often sore from exercise).

Get on all fours. Raise one arm so that it’s straight out from your shoulder, parallel to the floor. Extend the opposite leg so it’s also parallel to the floor. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat using the other arm and opposite leg. Then lie on your stomach and extend both hands and feet as if you were flying. Hold for 10 seconds.

Usually, the problem is the sudden overloading of muscles and ligaments that aren’t warmed up or strong or flexible enough to withstand the activity. Back spasms, bulging discs, and sciatica (pain shooting down the leg from the lower back) are less common but more painful.

Runners may be surprised to know their low back pain is usually not related to the above causes. ‘The most common cause of low back pain in runners is a leglength discrepancy,’ says Dr. Maharam. Repeated and jarring movement with one leg 1/4 inch longer than the other throws the back out of whack.

Back pain treatment depends on the injury. A bulging disc and sciatica require immediate medical attention. Leglength discrepancies are often solved by using orthotic lifts designed by a podiatrist. Back spasms and muscle pulls respond to RICE, anti-inflammatory medication, and a stretching and strengthening program.

To keep low back pain at bay, learn about proper standing and sitting posture and lifting techniques. Scores of good exercises increase back muscle strength and flexibility as well as abdominal muscle strength. Abs support the back muscles; if the abs are weak, the back muscles become overstrained.

**Shoulder Pain**
Shoulder pain is common in sports that involve excessive overhead motion, such as swimming, tennis, weight training, volleyball, baseball, and softball.

Most shoulder problems are from overuse. The shoulder is a ball-and-socket joint held together by a group of muscles and tendons called the rotator cuff. Repeated use loosens the rotator cuff, and you feel stiffness, a lack of strength, and slipping in the shoulder, especially as you raise your arm overhead. RICE and anti-inflammatory medication help shoulder pain. But the best treatment is also the best prevention: exercises to strengthen shoulder muscles.

**Tennis/Golf Elbow**
When the tendons and muscles on the outside of your elbow are repeatedly overloaded in the backhand stroke in tennis, the result is tennis elbow. Golf elbow can occur on either elbow—on the outside of the leading elbow (the left arm for right-handers) or the inside of the trailing elbow (the right arm).

RICE and anti-inflammatory medication are routinely prescribed with these elbow ailments. But pills and rest don’t heal the tissue, says Dr. Nirschl. ‘They are temporary comforters, not a cure,’ he says.

Forearm-strengthening exercises help in healing. Wrist curls (palm facing forward) and reverse wrist curls (palm facing backward) using light weights are great. Squeezing a soft rubber ball until arm fatigue sets in also builds strength.

Equipment adjustments are important in tennis and golf elbow. But the best help for tennis or golf elbow doesn’t come from a doctor, says Dr. DiNubile. ‘I tell some of my patients that they’d do better taking lessons from a tennis pro than to keep coming back to me.’
Seven Common Sports Injuries
Complete questions 1-14 below with information from the passage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Injury</th>
<th>Who gets it?</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>How common (as percentage % of injuries)?</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ankle Sprain</td>
<td>1. ___________</td>
<td>R.I.C.E</td>
<td>▪ Heel lifts ▪ High-top boots</td>
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<td>Low Back Pain</td>
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<td>6. ___________</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. ___________</td>
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<td>8. ___________</td>
<td>Warm-up and warm down exercises</td>
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<td>9. ___________</td>
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<td>▪ RICE</td>
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<td>12. ___________</td>
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<td>▪ Cross-training ▪ Strengthening of lower leg muscles</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Swimming, tennis, weight-training, volleyball, baseball</td>
<td>14. ___________</td>
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