

# Sports related injuries



Sports injuries can damage the ligaments, tendons or muscles that help our bodies move. Ligaments join bones together and tendons join muscle to bones. They both stabilise the joints in our bodies.

Acute sports injuries include sprains or strains, cuts, bruises and grazes. Chronic sports injuries result from the repeated use of a joint or ligament, and can be related to imperfect movement technique, or structural problems of the skeleton.

## Symptoms

Sports Injuries can include:

- cuts, bruises, grazes, nose bleeds, or damage to teeth and gums
- broken bones
- strains and sprains of the ankle, knee, hamstring or groin areas
- joint pain, swelling or stiffness that limits movement
- 'shin-splint' pain along the shin bone due to intensive running training
- dehydration caused by heat exhaustion, heat stroke or the loss of body fluids.

A *sprain* is a ligament that is torn or damaged when it has been over stretched and a *strain* occurs when either a muscle or tendon is damaged. A *bruise* (like a 'corked thigh') is bleeding that occurs under the skin.

## First-Aid for sprains and strains

As soon as an injury occurs, try to stop further bleeding and swelling by following the steps known as **R.I.C.E.R**

- R** Rest the injured part.
- I** Ice or apply a cold pack onto the injury. [Ice should be wrapped in a damp cloth rather than placed directly onto the skin].
- C** Compression bandaging. [Wrap a bandage firmly round the area]
- E** Elevate the injured part.
- R** Refer to a doctor if the pain or swelling becomes worse

Depending on the severity of bruising, rest may be continued for several days, and ice applied at regular intervals for up to 3 days.

The **NO HARM** protocol should also be followed for 48–72 hours. This will help prevent further swelling.

- no **H**eat
- no **A**lcohol
- no **R**unning or activity
- no **M**assage.

## First-Aid for minor cuts or grazes

- To stop bleeding, apply a clean dressing firmly to the wound for about five minutes.
- Wash the wound thoroughly with water or saline.
- Cover with a clean, dry dressing. See *Acute wound care* Health Information Brochure.

## First-Aid for nose bleeds

- Sit in a chair (leaning forward) with your mouth open and pinch your nose just below the bone for about 10 minutes non-stop. Stop and check if bleeding has stopped.
- Avoid tilting your head back to stop blood running into the throat.
- Apply an ice-pack to the forehead or neck.
- Avoid blowing the nose for about 15 minutes to allow the blood to clot.
- If symptoms persist, consult your doctor.

## Prevention

Aim to prevent sports injuries by taking some precautions, such as:

- warm up before any sports activity, and cool down afterwards
- wear appropriate footwear
- hydrate well by drinking lots of fluids. Water is good but electrolyte supplements from the pharmacy may be better if you sweat a lot. Avoid exercising outside during the hottest part of the day
- tape or strap your joint well
- use safety gear like mouthguards and helmets
- exercise regularly to strengthen your muscles, always using good form and technique
- don't over-exert yourself and if you feel any pain or discomfort, have a doctor or physiotherapist review the injury.

## Pharmacy options

**Always inform pharmacy staff if you are taking any other medicines, or if you have any other health conditions, because some over-the-counter medicines may not be suitable for you.**

Your pharmacy can assist with sports injury first-aid including:

- pain relievers like paracetamol, or anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen
- topical (skin) anti-inflammatory pain relievers like diclofenac
- rubs and liniments for massaging (avoid use for first 48–72 hours after injury)
- creams to manage bruising
- braces and bandages or tape, crutches and shock absorbing orthotics
- safety equipment like mouth guards
- dressings and bandages for injuries.

**Ask your pharmacist for advice on the most suitable treatment for you.**

See a doctor immediately if:

- bleeding does not stop
- the pain or swelling is severe, or symptoms are worsening
- the affected joint can not be moved, or you suspect a fracture
- the head, neck, spine or eye is injured.

## More information

Sports Medicine Australia: <https://sma.org.au/resources-advice/injury-fact-sheets>

Health Direct: [www.healthdirect.gov.au](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au)

Disclaimer: The information provided is a guide only, is current at time of publishing, and is not intended to replace the advice of your pharmacist or doctor.

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