



TRAINING TIPS

for Minimizing Sports Injuries and Recovering More Quickly

For weekend warriors desiring to continue their favorite athletic endeavors, staying active in sports can be a very positive thing. But it can also be risky and even result in injury if not approached correctly.

The key to avoiding injuries when participating in sports is to maintain a general level of fitness so the body is prepared to handle more intense activities.

“What’s most important to prevent injuries is to stay physically active at least three to five days a week, doing a mix of cardiovascular and strength training exercises,” says Dr. Mary Mulcahey, director of the Division of Sports Medicine at Loyola Medicine.

Dr. Timothy Petsche, a sports medicine specialist at Fox Valley Orthopaedics in Geneva agrees. “At any level of sports, the two most proven ways to prevent injuries include resistance training by lifting weights and getting stronger.”

Even stretching — often viewed as

a panacea for avoiding injuries — won’t help much if the body is not prepared for extended exertion. In fact, it can actually be counterproductive.

“Scientific studies have shown that stretching immediately prior to sports participation does not prevent injuries,” says Petsche. “In fact, there’s some evidence that prolonged stretching increases the probability of muscle tendon injuries or “pulled muscles.”

“Further studies have shown that a dynamic warm-up prior to participation in sports will help prevent injury,” adds Petsche. “This can include activities such as jogging, running, skipping and other movement related activities.”

Devoting time to recovery after high intensity physical activity is also very important, says Loyola’s Mulcahey. “Recovery includes getting appropriate sleep, eating a balanced diet, giving the body a break from high level exercise, and stretching.”

For minor sprains and strains, icing can be used to help decrease inflammation and swelling, especially when applied immediately after participating in an activity. It should be applied for only 15 or 20 minutes, but can be repeated several times a day if necessary. Similarly, for general soreness, applying heat can be an effective way to relax strained muscles.

Non-steroidal, anti-inflammatory medication like Advil, Ibuprofen and Aleve can be very helpful in terms of decreasing inflammation and associated discomfort from mild injuries, says Mulcahey. These medications can be taken before and/or after participating in physical activity.

But Petsche cautions against using even over-the-counter pain relievers on a regular basis. “The body gives pain for a reason,” he explains. “The pain is there to stop the person from causing harm to the body. That normal flow of information will be interrupted by pain relievers.” ■