

Game safety

- Wear a mouthguard, preferably custom-fitted, at all times.
- Protective headgear, ankle braces and thigh protectors can protect players with a history of head, ankle or thigh injuries.
- Drink water during and after a game or training session.
- Umpires should enforce game rules at all levels.
- Avoid drinking alcohol after a game.

Modify rules and equipment for children

- Games for children and teenagers should be played in accordance with the National Policy for the Conduct of Junior Football established by the Australian Football League.

If an injury occurs

- Players should seek prompt attention from qualified first aid personnel.
- A health professional should make the decision whether an injured player returns to the field.
- Ensure players are fully rehabilitated before returning to play after injury.



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References

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SMARTPLAY

Preventing Australian Football Injuries



Facts and Safety Tips for Australian Football Players

Facts on Australian football injuries

Australian football is one of the most popular sports in Australia, with thousands playing and watching the sport each year.

Statistics from the Exercise Recreation and Sports Survey (ERASS) conducted in 2004 showed an estimated 205,500 Victorians aged 15 years and older played football in the 12-month period prior to being surveyed.

Australian football is a contact sport that often results in injuries from tackling, kicking, running, handballing, marking and constant physical competition for the ball.

How many injuries?

- From 2002-2004, 3,472 people were admitted to Victorian hospitals while 9,562 people visited emergency departments for football-related injuries.
- 50% of hospital-treated injuries occur to players aged 15-24 years.
- 96% of all injury cases are male.
- Recent studies have indicated that the rates of injury in junior football, particularly Auskick, are very low.



The causes and types of injuries

- Common causes of injuries are being tackled, hit/struck by another player, hit by the ball and falls.
- Injuries are more likely to occur in the first four weeks of the playing season.
- 40% of hospital-treated injuries are wrist, hand, finger and forearm fractures, dislocations and sprains.
- Injuries to the thigh, knee, lower leg and ankle are most common in non-hospital-treated injuries.
- Overuse injuries occur frequently among higher level and older players.
- Sports medicine clinics most commonly treat knee and ankle sprains.

Factors increasing your injury risk

- Having had a sports injury in the previous 12 months.
- Being aged 25 years or older.
- Playing in midfield positions.
- Persistent back problems diagnosed by a health professional.
- Increasing age and decreasing quadriceps flexibility, for sustaining hamstring injury.
- A history of two or more injuries to the lower body, in the previous football season.

Factors decreasing your injury risk

- Playing football in the last 12 months.
- Excellent stamina.
- Cooling down after training sessions.
- Playing a modified rules version at junior level.
- Participating in one or more hours per week of weight training during the season, to decrease the risk of lower body injury.

Safety tips for footballers

Good preparation is important

- Undertake training sessions prior to competition to ensure readiness to play.
- Undertake pre-season training to improve strength, flexibility, stamina, agility and balance. A trained coach or fitness advisor can guide you in the right direction.
- Before playing competitively learn, practise and use correct skills and techniques.

Providing a safe environment

- Check the ground to remove or cover hazardous objects e.g. broken glass or sprinkler heads.
- Cricket pitches should be covered with a soft surface.
- Fences should be a minimum of three metres from the boundary line.
- Goal posts must be padded with high-density foam, at least two metres high and with 35 millimetres thickness. Padding should be in good condition and replaced when worn or damaged.
- Qualified first aid personnel, first aids kits, ice packs and a stretcher should be available at all times.
- Telephone access, to contact emergency services, is essential.

Pre-game safety

- Complete a warm up including stretching, slow jogging and running activities, with and without a football.
- Eat a balanced, nutritional diet.
- Drink water before a game or training session.
- Avoid drinking alcohol 48 hours before a game.
- Seek professional advice about the most appropriate boots to wear for playing conditions.
- Wear sunscreen and re-apply during breaks on sunny days.
- Be aware of game rules, play fairly and respect opponents and umpiring decisions.