



Playing sports and taking regular exercise can help you maintain a healthy lifestyle. For example, exercise can protect against heart problems, prevent obesity and reduce the risk of osteoporosis by increasing bone density. But sports injuries can affect sportsmen and women of all ages and abilities.

While accidents account for some injuries, most result from inadequate or inappropriate preparation, or playing on after being injured. Physiotherapy offers effective treatment for sports injuries and can help reduce your risk of injury.

This leaflet offers advice on how to deal with and overcome sports injuries. It also has information on where to seek professional treatment, should you need specialist expertise.

Chartered physiotherapists can help you avoid and manage sports injuries. They are experts in body movement and understand how muscles and joints work and why injuries can occur. They are trained to a high clinical standard, having completed a physiotherapy degree at university and over 1000 hours of supervised clinical practice. Some also have postgraduate qualifications and masters degrees. Physiotherapists not only treat existing conditions; they can also give you advice on preventing injuries in the future.

### What are the most common causes of sports injuries?

Sports injuries can affect all joints, muscles and ligaments. The nature of the sport can determine which joints are most at risk. Tennis, for example, increases the risk of shoulder problems, whereas jogging increases the likelihood of knee and ankle injuries.

Common causes of sports injuries are:

- > **Inadequate and/or inappropriate fitness and preparation for sport.** Warm-up exercises are essential to increase the blood flow to the muscles and make them more flexible, thus preparing you for activity. Post-exercise

cooling down is also important as it can help to prevent next day stiffness.

- > **Inappropriate training such as doing too much and repeating the same activities.** Pain during or after exercise is a signal that your body may be having problems that shouldn't be ignored.
- > **Improper equipment** – wearing the wrong type of sports shoes, or using an unsuitable racquet for example.
- > **Incorrect technique and posture.**
- > **Collision, notably in contact sports such as rugby.**
- > **Insufficient rehabilitation and returning to sport too soon following an injury.**

### What should I do if I have a problem?

The seriousness of an injury is usually indicated by the level of pain. If you experience severe pain, extensive bruising, or immediate swelling you should seek medical attention. However, for mild sprains and strains, you can self-treat. Apply the PRICE principles as soon as you can.

#### PRICE stands for:

**Protection** – support the injured part by taping or strapping to protect against further damage. Seek expert help and advice, as poor strapping can make some injuries worse.

**Rest** – continuing to exercise a damaged muscle, joint or ligament can turn a minor problem into a major one. A rest from sport for the first 72 hours following injury helps promote healing.

**Ice** – apply an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables (wrapped in a damp tea towel to prevent ice burns) immediately for 20-30 minutes, and repeat every two hours. Reduce the

time to 10-20 minutes if you are applying ice over a bony area like your ankle. Applying heat during the first 72 hours is not advisable.

**Compression** – a compression bandage will help reduce swelling. Make sure you use a stretchy bandage and don't apply it too tightly. If unsure seek advice.

**Elevation** – elevate the injured part whenever possible. Ideally this should be above the level of your heart. If the injured area can be elevated, do not apply compression at the same time.

### When should I see a physiotherapist?

The best policy is to apply the PRICE principles immediately following injury. If the injury does not improve significantly within 48 hours, make an appointment with a chartered physiotherapist.

### What sort of help can a physiotherapist offer?

A physiotherapist will help relieve your symptoms and promote tissue healing. Before any action is taken, the physiotherapist will assess and diagnose the problem, help you understand what's wrong and explain how you can avoid further problems.