

Top 10 Most Common Sports Injuries

Whether you are a highly-trained athlete or a weekend warrior, there's always a chance you could get injured. Unfortunately, when injuries happen, it can be hard to know what you've tweaked or how to treat it. Brian McEvoy, PT, UnityPoint Health, counts down the most common sports injuries, from the least common to the most common, along with possible causes, treatments and recovery strategies.

10. Hip Flexor Strain

The hip flexors are muscles found on the upper-front side of your thigh. The main functions of the hip flexor muscles are to lift the knee toward your trunk, as well as assist moving your leg toward and away from the other leg. Hip flexors can be weak in individuals who sit a great deal at work or can become weak and stiff in individuals who have poor sitting posture. Sports injuries to this muscle group can be caused by sprinting, running inclines and activities with quick turns and sudden starts.

"Common symptoms of a hip flexor strain would include pain with raising the leg, such as stair climbing and transfers in and out of a car, as well as cutting and running activities," McEvoy says. "Someone who experiences a hip flexor strain might notice bruising in the front of the upper thigh and groin area."

A hip flexor strain is best treated by rest and [icing](#) for 15 to 20 minutes at a time for the first 48 to 72 hours. After the first three recovery days, the injured athlete could apply [heat](#) for 15 to 20 minutes followed by lying down and performing gentle heel slides and hip flexor stretches. If the pain, symptoms and limited activity remain after two weeks, the individual should seek out physical therapy for pain and swelling control and instruction in specific hip-strengthening exercises to regain power, range of motion and movement.

9. ACL Tear or Strain

The ACL, anterior cruciate ligament, is one of the major stabilizing ligaments of the knee. The most common cause of sports injuries for an ACL strain is slowing down and trying to cut, pivot or change directions. Ligaments on the inside of the knee are often torn with the ACL injury, making it a devastating event.

Complaints of instability when walking or turning corners, as well as increased swelling in the knee would be common ACL tear symptoms. A slight ACL strain or tear can be healed without surgery using rest and ice, as the scar tissue helps heal the ligament and the knee becomes more stable. A complete ACL tear would require surgery and a few months of recovery time with aggressive physical therapy before the athlete would be able to return to activity.

8. Concussion

A [concussion can be defined as injury to the brain](#), due a blow to the head where the brain is jarred or shaken. Concussions are serious injuries that should not be taken lightly. An athlete who experiences a concussion should seek out a certified athletic trainer or a physician with experience treating concussions. Common concussion symptoms can include:

- Headache
- Confusion
- Dizziness
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Sensitivity to light
- Delayed response to questions

"Athletes diagnosed with a concussion should never return to their sport without being medically cleared by a [health care professional trained in concussion evaluation](#)," McEvoy says.

Common concussion treatments include rest, reduced activities requiring mental or physical stress and slowly increasing physical activities, as long as symptoms do not return.

7. Groin Pull

A groin pull is also called a groin strain. The groin muscles run from the upper-inner thigh to the inner thigh right above the knee. Groin muscles pull the legs together and are often injured with quick side-to-side movements and/or a lack of flexibility. The injured athlete might notice difficulty with lateral movements, getting in and out of cars, as well as tenderness or bruising in the groin or inner thigh.

Groin pull treatment includes rest and icing for 15 to 20 minutes periodically during the first 72 hours. After the first three days, the athlete could use heat for 15 to 20 minutes periodically, followed by gentle, proper groin stretching and range of motion exercises, for example, by making snow angels on the floor.

6. Shin Splints

Athletes with shin splints complain of pain in the lower leg bone, or the tibia. Shin splints are most often found in athletes who are runners or participate in activities with a great deal of running, such as soccer. Athletes typically get shin splints diagnosed early in their season, as they increase activities or

mileage too quickly. Shin splints are best prevented and/or treated with rest, icing and [gradually increasing running activities](#). Purchasing shoes with good arch support can also reduce pain in the shins and help with recovery.

5. Sciatica

Sciatica is back pain that also travels down the back of the leg or even to the feet. This radiating pain can additionally be associated with numbness, burning and tingling down the leg. Sciatica can be seen in athletes who are in a flexed forward posture, such as [cyclists](#), or athletes who perform a great deal of trunk rotation in the swing sports, like [golf](#) and tennis. The back pain and radiating pain can be caused by a bulging disc or a pinched nerve. Sometimes, rest, stretching the back and hamstrings and laying on your stomach can help alleviate the symptoms. If pain, numbness or tingling persists for more than two weeks, then the athlete should seek out a medical professional, such as a physical therapist, to help alleviate sciatica symptoms.

4. Hamstring Strain

The hamstring muscle is located on the back of the thigh. Unfortunately, the hamstring muscles can be tight and are susceptible to a strain, which is also called a pulled muscle. Poor stretching techniques or lack of stretching can be the cause of a hamstring tear/strain. Often, an athlete with a hamstring tear will experience bruising in the back of the thigh or the knee. Rest and icing are the common early treatment techniques for a pulled hamstring, followed by gentle stretching and strengthening to prevent another injury. If the pain persists more than two weeks, the athlete could try physical therapy to use ultrasound or other methods to promote healing the pulled muscle.

3. Tennis or Golf Elbow

Tennis and golfer's elbow is usually seen with athletes performing a great deal of gripping activities. It can be labeled as an overuse sports injury, also known as medial or lateral epicondylitis. Due to the repetitive action, the tendons of the forearm can become inflamed and make any wrist or hand motions extremely painful. Often, athletes will complain of a lack of grip strength. Early treatment options for tennis or golf elbow involve rest and icing the inflamed area. Doctors will often prescribe [anti-inflammatory medication](#), or even a brace, to try to take pressure off the area and prevent further elbow injuries. Stretching techniques and other strengthening exercises applied by an occupational or physical therapist can help to break down the stiffness and gradually build strength, returning athletes to their sporting activities.

2. Shoulder Injury

Shoulder injuries cover a large number of sports injuries from dislocations, misalignment, strains on muscles and sprains of ligaments.

"The shoulder is the weakest joint of the body and is subject to a great deal of force during athletic activities. Many shoulder injuries can be caused by either a lack of flexibility, strength or stabilization," McEvoy says.

Shoulder injury treatment starts with rest and icing to help with pain and swelling relief. Any pain persisting for more than two weeks should be evaluated by a physical therapist.

1. Patellofemoral Syndrome

The majority of sports injuries involve the lower body, particularly knee injuries. One of the most common knee injuries is called patellofemoral syndrome. This diagnosis can be caused by a slip or a fall onto the knees, swelling of the knee joint or a muscle imbalance. The patella, or kneecap, should travel in the groove at the end of the femur or thigh bone. Sometimes, a fall onto the knee can cause swelling, leading to a muscle imbalance of the two major muscles that aid in proper tracking of the kneecap in the groove. This muscle imbalance can create more swelling, making the tracking problem even worse. Rest and ice can help with knee injury pain and swelling. Gentle isometric, or static, strengthening exercises for the inner thigh muscle and gently stretching muscles for the outer or lateral thigh muscles can help to correct the muscle imbalance. If knee injury pain or dysfunction continues for more than two weeks, a referral to a physical therapist could help with more aggressive stretching and strengthening. A physical therapist may use knee taping or bracing techniques to aid with proper tracking.

Task

- 1) Which sport do you think is the most common for each type of injury? Why?