

# Playing sport is healthy: just try not to get injured along the way

## FAITH IN SPORT

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As with life in general, accidents and collisions can occur in contact sports – with head injuries commonplace in football, rugby, hockey and many others. While rules are in place in such sports to protect players from head injuries, collisions are inevitable.

High tackles are illegal in rugby league play. As per International Rugby League (IRL) laws, a player is judged guilty of misconduct if, when effecting or attempting to effect a tackle, he or she ‘makes contact with the head or neck of an opponent intentionally, recklessly or carelessly.’

In rugby union, a player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerously. Dangerous tackling includes, but is not limited to, tackling or attempting to tackle an opponent above the line of the shoulders – even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders.

A spear tackle is an illegal tackle in rugby union, rugby league and Australian rules football in which a player lifts another player into the air and drops them so that they land on their back, head or neck.

In 1976, the tackling technique known as spearing was banned across the board. Associations such as the National Football League (NFL), and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFSHSA) made it illegal to perform any kind of spearing or head down contact to another player.

When you have had concussion, you may not play or train for at least three weeks from the time of your concussion. You must start with a period of rest, then some light aerobic activities, moving on to more aerobic exercise and strength training. It is only when players are symptom free, and declared fit after a medical examination, that they can then return to full training.

One of the most notorious sports for knee damage is weightlifting, which puts a lot of extra strain on the joints, particularly the knees during squats and free-weight use. Then there is cycling, tennis, football, basketball and netball.

Knee injuries in cyclists often occur due to bicycle misalignment, long-distance riding, and a lack of conditioning before cycling. To minimise knee injury while cycling, it is wise to adjust the saddle-pedal distance and ensure that the saddle is in the correct position.

If you are a cyclist who has ever felt the sharp twinge in one or both of your knees, you are not alone. Research shows that anywhere from 23 to 33 percent of cyclists have suffered from cycling-related knee



**Cycling is a proven way to get fit – but over doing it risks serious muscular and joint injuries**

pain at one point or another. Yet the good news is that most cycling-related knee pain is solvable.

A common cause of cycling knee pain comes from “overdoing it”. You ride longer and/or harder than your body is conditioned to, which strains your connective tissues, causing inflammation and pain. But what about those spontaneous twinges of crank-stopping knee pain? It might feel like they came out of nowhere, but they’re usually just the first noticeable symptoms of a long-brewing problem, and can leave you wondering why your knees hurt so much.

Below are the top four toughest sports on your hips and knees.

#### 1. Skiing

One of the most common ways to injure a knee or hip is by a fall. Skiing is one of the sports with one of the highest chances of falling, and is especially dangerous when the slopes are icy or bumpy. Even without falling, skiing places strain on both joints if your form is incorrect, which can damage the joints over time. Mogul skiers have additional strain put on their knees by absorbing the shock of the jumps.

If skiing is a must in your life, then be very mindful of your form, make sure you do not lock your knees (especially on bumpy slopes), keep the muscles around the knee active to help absorb any shocks, and avoid doing dangerous jumps.

#### 2. Basketball

Basketball is a fast-paced sport with sudden stops, pivots, and jumps. The constant shocks and twists put strain on the knees, which act as the body’s shock absorbers. While the majority of basketball injuries are to the ankle and feet, the

fast pace of the game can also lead to a hip labral tear or hip pointer. People who play basketball regularly and at a high intensity are at a greater risk of osteoarthritis, so be mindful of your long-term health when getting ready for a game.

#### 3. Tennis.

Due to the repetitive upper-body motions, tennis players may have strength imbalances between the upper and lower body. The short bursts of running with constant sudden stops hit the knees, while the hips lend their power to the forces holding and swinging the racket.

The most effective way to lessen damage is to do a long and deep warm up, and avoid sudden stops while sprinting. Slow your speed before stopping completely and then stop with your knees unlocked, placing more burden on the muscles surrounding the joint. You might also consider playing doubles, so there’s less running around.

#### 4. Plyometric and Weight Room Exercises.

Plyometric exercises are exercises which involve a lot of jumping and the exertion of maximum force in short bursts (eg, burpees, lunges, jump squats). In a jump landing, the knee absorbs the force, making this especially taxing for these weight-bearing joints. Lower-body weight room exercises are especially tough on the hips because it may be difficult to maintain proper form. Make sure to start your workouts with lighter weights before getting into the heavy lifting, and always dedicate some time to stretch out your muscles and joints afterwards.

There is no guaranteed way to practice a sport that will ensure

safety, especially if you play competitively, but if you consult your doctor or a training professional before participating you will be more aware of the risks to your body and better prepared to employ safety measures. These include always warming up before engaging in physical activity and stopping immediately if you have sharp pain.

Aim for balance in your exercise regimen. Mix it up between weight-bearing activities (skiing, running) and non-weight-bearing activities (cycling, swimming). That said, even if you have or likely will have osteoarthritis, there are many low-impact activities you can do that have minimal risk: elliptical training, doubles tennis, yoga, cycling on a flat surface, and swimming. When it comes to your long-term health, nothing is truly black and white. Staying active is one of the best ways to ensure healthy bones and joints, but you should stay mindful of the types of movements that may end up doing more harm than good.

Chronic extreme exercise training and competing in endurance events can lead to heart damage and rhythm disorders. People with genetic risk factors are especially vulnerable.

A daily routine of physical activity is highly beneficial in the prevention and treatment of many prevalent chronic diseases, especially of the cardiovascular (CV) system. However, chronic, excessive sustained endurance exercise may cause adverse structural remodelling of the heart and large arteries.

Hip sprains and strains are common in sports that require repetitive use of the lower body, such as cycling, running, swimming,

baseball, and golf.

Tennis champion Andy Murray has opened up about the impact his hip injury and subsequent “resurfacing” operation had on his marriage. In January 2019, the 32-year-old announced that the Australian Open might be the final tournament of his career due to the continuing pain he was experiencing from a “severely damaged hip”.

However, on 28th January, Murray elected to undergo an operation on the hip to “improve his quality of life”. The operation was a success and Murray enjoyed a winning return to competitive action at Queen’s Club in London in June.

In a recent interview with *The Times*, the two-time Wimbledon champion has opened up about his injury and admitted that he was struggling with depression throughout that time. “I was pretty down, that’s for sure,” Murray said. “It was a really tough period for me because it wasn’t so much the actual injury itself. Being injured can be frustrating, but the issue that I had was with me every single day, sleeping and walking. It wasn’t just I hit a serve and my arm hurt. This woke me up in the night. It was bad.”

When asked if his family were aware of how much pain he was in, Murray said that he tried to put on a “brave face” for his children, but that his wife, Kim Sears, knew just how much he was struggling.

He added that his low mood negatively affected his marriage and praised Kim for her continued support. “It put a lot of strain on our relationship, just because I was down all the time,” Murray admitted.

“She has been brilliant and I would probably be quite selfish, just in terms of thinking about myself and how I’m feeling all the time and not actually realising the impact that has on all the people around me. When everyone was trying to encourage me to keep going and keep trying and keep playing, I was, like, ‘You don’t know what it’s like. You don’t know what it is that I’m feeling.’”

However, Andy has guts in spades. In this year’s Australian Open, he won his first game by beating the 13th seed Matteo Berrettini in five sets. Then, in the second round, two sets down to Australia’s Thanasi Kokkinakis, Andy produced a trademark indefatigable display to claim an outrageous 4-6, 6-7(4-7), 7-6(7-5), 6-3, 7-5 win. It was the longest, five hour, 45 minutes, match of the 35-year-old’s stellar career before he bowed out in heroic fashion after a valiant defeat to Bautista Agut in the third round. Even with his metal hip, Andy showed how guts, determination and a willingness to look after your health can take you a long way.