

## Soccer

Soccer is the most popular team sport in the world and is the fastest growing sport in the United States. Soccer develops balance, agility, coordination, and a sense of teamwork. Since soccer primarily utilizes the lower body, it is only natural that most injuries occur in the lower extremities.

### What are the most common types of injuries in soccer?

#### **Thigh Injuries**

Because of the quick starting and stopping that is associated with soccer, muscle strains are common. It is also common for the quadriceps (muscles in front of the thigh) to be more developed than the hamstrings (muscles in the back of the thigh), increasing the risk of muscle strain. The adductor muscles (muscles of the groin) are often strained as well, because of the way a soccer player kicks the ball.

#### **Knee Injuries**

Soccer players commonly injure their knees. Sprains of the medial and lateral collateral ligaments (MCL/LCL) occur. More serious injuries of the anterior and posterior cruciate ligaments (ACL/PCL) and to the menisci (cartilage of the knee) can also happen. These severe injuries usually require surgical intervention for treatment.

#### **Lower Leg Injuries**

Shin contusions or bruises are very common in soccer because of kicking accidents or mistakes by another player going directly for the ball. Properly fitting shin guards will help protect this area. Ankle sprains are also very common. If fractures do occur in soccer, it usually happens to the bones of the lower leg and foot.

#### **Concussions**

Concussions do occur in soccer. However, heading the ball with proper technique is not believed to increase the risk of concussion. This is believed to be because



intentional heading of a soccer ball is supported by the neck muscles, which act as a shock absorber. When concussions happen in soccer it is usually due to a fall, where a player hits his/her head on the ground, or in a collision with another player. For more information, please refer to our concussion handout.

### How can injuries in soccer be prevented?

- Use properly fitted shin guards and footwear.
- If running for long distances and time, without any soccer ball work or drills, run in sneakers, not cleats. This will decrease the risk of an overuse injury.
- Maintain proper fitness, most injuries happen when an athlete is tired.
- Use properly sized synthetic balls. Waterlogged balls can become heavy and dangerous.
- Incorporate a well balanced lower extremity strengthening and stretching program into your normal routine. This routine should be balanced to all muscle groups of the lower extremity as well as the core musculature.
- Consult a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer with any concerns about particular injuries or prevention methods.