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### **Sports Injuries – What You Need To Know!**

Many people get into the groove during exercise and forget about some key principles for safe and effective workouts. Exercising when you have pain is one of them, and it's the fastest way to develop a serious or persistent injury. A good foundation is one of the keys to injury prevention. You should strengthen all your joints and do a varied work out that challenges your balance, agility, flexibility and core muscles. The best method for preventing injuries depends on the sport. Some of the most frustrating injuries are related to overuse. In these cases, it's best to optimize our ability to offload stresses that accumulate. This includes analysis by healthcare professionals.

If you want to prevent injuries, your body should be prepared to protect itself from the stresses of your sport. The best way to do this is to continue to strengthen your body bilaterally. Balanced strength is the key to allow one side of the body to counter-balance the load on the other while participating in a sport. Our bodies lose an average of seven pounds of muscle mass for every decade we live after 40 years old. Because of this aging process, we need to continue efforts to safely improve our strength by exercising all body parts. Also wear proper fitting shoes, stretch tight muscles to allow the muscle to lengthen and have healthier response to the workout, and to warm up slowly.

It has been estimated that at least half of sports injuries could have been prevented by the use of management tools that consider factors such as the environment of a particular sport and protection of the individual. What factors should be looked at are: the temperature of the environment, cooler is best. The playing surface, the more shock absorbent the fewer injuries; the proximity of motor vehicles for activities such as biking, proper maintenance of equipment used in the sport, and firm enforcement of the rules. Also use protective devices such as pads, helmets, mouth guards and gloves and make sure they fit properly and are in good working condition. It is recommended to have a proper medical evaluation prior to participation in organized sports.

Starting a child in sports too young will not benefit the child physically. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children begin participating in team sports at age six, when they better understand the concept of teamwork. However, no two children are alike, and some may not be ready physically or psychologically to take part in a team sport even at age six.

So be smart about exercise and sports to maximize your health. STOP if:

- Sudden, severe pain
- Swelling
- Inability to place weight on a lower limb
- Extreme tenderness in an upper limb
- Inability to move a joint through its full range of motion
- Extreme limb weakness
- Visible dislocation or break of a bone
- Pain when performing an activity
- A dull ache when at rest

If pain persists, use the RICE formula: Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation, and call your doctor. You may need additional support that can be offered through Cottage Hospital's Physical Therapy department.

Cottage Hospital is a 25 bed, critical access hospital serving the beautiful Upper Connecticut River Valley. For additional information regarding Cottage Hospital and any of our services, visit us on the web at [www.cottagehospital.org](http://www.cottagehospital.org), or call (603)747-9000.

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