

DR. AMIT MEENA

MBBS, MS (Ortho), DNB (Ortho), MNAMS
Consultant-Joint Replacement & Arthroscopy
Fellowship in Arthroplasty & Arthroscopy
(Italy, Austria, Canada)

+91-8467 920 426

ameena@uwo.ca

www.kneecares.com

FORMERLY AT

- Safdarjung Hospital, New Delhi
- AIIMS, New Delhi
- The Rizzoli Orthopaedics Institute, Italy
- GELENKPUNKT FIFA Medical Centre of Excellence, Austria
- Western University, London, Ontario, Canada

Soccer Injuries and How to Prevent Them

Introduction

Soccer has become increasingly popular in all age groups. Athletes participating in soccer vary from youths to adults of both genders, with varying levels of expertise. Female soccer players, in particular, have discovered the sport in increasing numbers.

Get In Shape

Soccer is a sport that requires both a level of aerobic (endurance) and anaerobic (strength) fitness. It is clearly best to have a good level of conditioning in both these areas, as the sport is very demanding. It is a sport that sets up a risk of injury if performed once or twice a week without being involved in other fitness activities. These would include aerobic conditioning such as running, biking, and elliptical training.

Additionally, it is also best to include a strengthening regimen that includes resistance training with weights, Pilates, and yoga. Core strengthening – a focus on the trunk of the body – is often overlooked but very important.

Although stretching has not been clearly shown to prevent injuries, it is felt to be of general benefit in terms of improving range of motion, flexibility, soreness, and healing.

Common Soccer Injuries/Prevention

Specific injuries commonly seen in soccer involve the legs, from the hip to the toe. Injuries to the head and face are the second-most frequent injuries, with back-related problems coming in third.

These can be sudden, **traumatic injuries** that can be preventable or non-preventable. While events involving collision are usually not preventable, understanding the rules of the game are critical. The two rules that are the most important to observe focus on not contacting other players from behind and keeping the elbows below shoulder level when coming in contact with opponents.

It is rare to sustain a head injury such as a concussion from heading the ball. Most occur as a result of contact with another player or the head hitting the ground or the goalpost.

Lower extremity injuries (occurring below the waist) can also be caused by contact, but most – including knee ligament tears – are non-contact events. Anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears are most frequently the result of "cutting" from side to side, or landing from a jump.

They occur more commonly in females. Prevention exercises and programs are essential in protecting yourself from an ACL injury.

Other sudden injuries include ankle sprains or muscle tears and "pulls." Proper ankle taping and wearing ankle braces can aid in stability and should not have a negative impact on your game.



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A strained muscle can commonly occur in the calf, hamstring, quadriceps, or groin. General conditioning as mentioned is the best prevention in terms of strains, and a proper warm-up routine is also important. The best warm-up aims to involve sport-specific activities involving kicking and light jogging, progressing to sprinting.

Overuse injuries can occur, and are the result of repetitive "micro-injury" such as tendinitis or stress fractures. These happen most commonly in the setting of, again, poor conditioning. They can also be seen at the other end of the spectrum, in which individuals are pushing activity beyond their level of conditioning. It is best to have at least one to two days a week of non-impact activities if an athlete is exercising daily.

