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Soccer Injury Prevention: Stay off the Sideline and on the Field

No one wants to get sidelined with an injury. Ankle sprains and injuries to the knee, particularly the ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) are common in soccer. Is there anything you can do to prevent yourself from missing valuable playing time? Absolutely.

Learning how to move with good form and alignment will help protect your knees. Having the body awareness and balance to support your knees and ankle is the first step. Here are some more detailed tips:

- Always jump, land, stop and move with your knees directly over your feet
- Do not let your knees collapse inward
- Develop strength in your hips and hamstrings
- Warm up and stretch before games and practice
- Remind yourself: knees over toes, land soft

Perform the following drills on your own or with teammates until the movement patterns are second nature and you don't have to think about it.

1. Squat

- Stand with your feet about hip width apart
- Bend from your hips and knees
- Sit back. Stick your buttocks out with your chest high. Keep your knees behind your toes. Don't go any lower than if you were sitting in a chair.
- Remember, keep your knees and feet facing straight ahead as you squat.
- Try squatting on just on leg. Do not let your knee turn inward.

2. Balance and Hip Strengthening

- Stand on one leg with your knee slightly bent and your hip, knee and foot in a straight line. How long can you stand on each foot?
- Now turn your right leg out and lift it to the side 10-15 times. Keep your body straight. Try to keep your balance. Perform 3 sets of 10-15 repetitions.
- Need more of a challenge? Do the exercises with your eyes closed or use an elastic band.

3. Walking Lunges

- Perform walking lunges halfway across the field and then back
- As you step, keep your front knee over your ankle in line with your toes

4. Changing Direction

- Run to a line or cone, plant your outside foot without letting your knee collapse inward to change direction. Move in patterns that take you front to back, side to side and diagonally. Start by running slowly so you can concentrate on good position: Hips over knees and over toes. Then pick up the pace and maintain good technique.



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5. Jumping and Landing Drills

- Jump straight upward several times. Spring up, then land with your feet and knees pointing straight ahead. Make sure your knees are straight: no knock knees. Let your knees bend softly each time you land. Practice these jumps facing a teammate and ask her to watch your form. Remember: Knees bent, chest high, butt back, land soft.
- Have your teammate throw a ball up. Head it and land correctly.
- Jump over a line on the field or a soccer ball and stick your landing. Don't let your knee(s) turn in.
- Jump side-to-side with both feet over a ball or line.
- Jump from your left to right foot over a ball or line.
- Jump forward-and-back with both feet over a ball or line.
- Jump forward-and-back over a ball or line leading with your right foot. Keep feet hip width apart. Now lead with your left.

Practice these drills on your own and if possible, with your team. Don't wait until the season starts when your priorities will be to run plays and work with your teammates. A good thing to remember is to get in shape to play, don't play to get in shape.

