Exercise Safety Guidelines

Regular physical activity is vital for good health. While there is a risk of injury with any type of physical activity, the benefits of staying active far outweigh the risks. You can reduce your risk of exercise injury by following these recommendations:

Get good advice
You can obtain information and advice about exercise safety from your doctor, a sports medicine doctor, physiotherapist or an exercise physiologist or see a sporting association about sporting technique and equipment.

Take care and listen to your body
Injuries are more likely if you ignore your body's signals of fatigue, discomfort and pain.
Suggestions include:

- See your doctor for a full medical check-up before embarking on any new fitness program.
- Cross-train with other sports and exercises to reduce the risk of overtraining.
- Make your exercise program progressive--Respect your current fitness level by starting an exercise program at a pace and duration that you know you can maintain. Increase intensity and duration gradually.
- Make sure you have at least one recovery day, and preferably two, every week.
- Injuries need rest – trying to 'work through' the pain will cause more damage to soft muscle tissue and delay healing.
- If you have a pre-existing injury or an area that is prone to injury, consult your doctor or physiotherapist before starting. Rehabilitation exercises may help to strengthen the injured area or you may be advised to strap it prior to exercising to provide support.

Stop exercising immediately
If you experience any of the following symptoms, stop exercising and seek medical help:

- Feel discomfort or pain
- Have chest pain or other pain that could indicate a heart attack, including pain in the neck and jaw, pain travelling down the arm or pain between the shoulder blades
- Experience extreme breathlessness
- Develop a rapid or irregular heartbeat during exercise
- Joint pain persisting after more than three days of rest

Take it easy if you are sick or injured

When you come down with a cold or other illness your body needs all of its resources to combat the infection and heal. This is also true when recovering from an injury or surgery. Adding exercise to the stress of illness puts extra strain on your body's energy reserves and immune system. Wait until you are fully recovered before resuming regular exercise. When you do resume, take into account your period of inactivity and avoid vigorous workouts until your body is back into the routine.

Learn how to avoid repetitive stress injuries

Many physical activities have the potential for creating cumulative damage to muscles and joints.

By nature, physical activity presents a stress to the body in the form of physical resistance and/or

impact. Repeated stress can result in microscopic tears within the muscles as well as inflammation of tendons and joint surfaces. This damage usually announces itself by way of joint

swelling and/or pain in the knees, feet, shoulders, or other joints. If the damage is mild the body is able to make repairs, given there is time allowed for healing. More severe damage and inflammation occurs when time between stresses is not adequate to allow healing. Chronic pain, inflammation, and scarification is the result.

How to warm-up

- As the name suggests, your warm-up (5–10 minutes) should gradually warm your muscles and body temperature.
- The type of activity done in the warm-up should include major muscle groups that will be used in your sporting activity.
- Your warm-up could begin with a low intensity activity such as brisk walking or jogging.
- Stretching should be performed once the muscles have been warmed, as the stretching of cold muscles are less effective. It is also important to stretch after activity as well to assist recovery.

Why cool down?

- To reduce muscle soreness and stiffness
- In the last 5 minutes, slow down gradually to a light jog or brisk walk.
- Finish off with 5–10 minutes of stretching (emphasize the major muscle groups you have used during your activity).

Drinking lots of water

You can lose around one and a half liters of fluid for every hour of exercise. One of the first symptoms of dehydration is fatigue, which causes a significant drop in sporting performance. It may also make you susceptible to cramps, heat stress and heat stroke. Suggestions include:

- Avoid starting exercise dehydrated. Drink plenty of fluids for several hours prior to exercise.
- If you are well hydrated you should be able to pass a good volume of clear urine in the hour before exercise.
- Drink at least 500ml (2 cups) an hour before exercise.
- Drink at least 150 ml every 15 minutes during exercise.
- During exercise take advantage of all breaks in play to drink up.
- After exercise, drink liberally to ensure you are fully re-hydrated.

Wearing the right shoes, gear and equipment

Most sports and exercises rely on some type of equipment, such as shoes, bicycles or racquets. Protective equipment – such as mouth guards, shin pads and helmets – can significantly reduce the risk of injury by absorbing the impact of falls or collisions. Safety suggestions include:

- If your sporting equipment is handheld, make sure you are using the right grip – for example, holding a tennis racquet the wrong way can increase your risk of tennis elbow (tendonitis).
- Make sure your equipment is appropriate to your sport or activity and the size and age of the participant.
- Wear appropriate shoes for your sport and replace them before they wear out.
- Protective equipment should be worn during training, not just for competition and games.
- Check equipment regularly and replace it if worn out. If you are unsure how to maintain or check your equipment, consult with your coach or sporting association.
- Injuries can also be caused by improper form or technique. Consult your gym instructor, coach, sporting association, exercise physiologist or physiotherapist for instruction on how to improve your sporting technique.