

# Sports Injuries - Pushing the limits

Skiing on a bruised shin in the downhill competition for Olympic gold, Lindsey Vonn may inspire the weekend warrior in all of us. But even “backyard competitors” need to take the proper precautions to avoid injury, says sports medicine and orthopaedic experts from Forsyth Medical Center.

“While many of the most painful injuries professional athletes get occur as a result of intense competition, for amateurs even a simple game of Frisbee or flag football can turn dangerous without the right conditioning and safety measures,” says Douglas Browning, M.D., a sports medicine physician at Forsyth Medical Center.

Some of the most common sports-related injuries are:

- Joint injuries, including tennis elbow, ankle sprains, dislocated shoulders, and tears to the ligaments or cartilage that help stabilize the knees
- Achilles tendon injuries, including soreness or tears of the fibrous tissue that connects the heel to the muscles of the lower leg
- Muscle pulls and strains that occur when the muscle is stretched too far or is forced to lift too much weight
- Fractures, ranging from tiny cracks (stress fractures) in the bone to more serious breaks
- Concussions caused by a blow to the head from colliding with another player or from a fall

In many cases, Browning says, injuries are brought on by overusing certain parts of the body or by not warming muscles and tendons up first with stretching so that they have had a chance to become flexible. Most of the fractures and ligament tears he treats occur when athletes receive a hard blow or fall on a hard surface.

“I tell my patients, “Twist or turn too suddenly, or even attempt to push your body beyond its conditioning, and you could end up with an injury,”” Browning says.

So, what can you do to prevent injuries?

- Get a physical exam *before* you start a new exercise program or sign up for the weekend soccer league. It will help rule out any medical conditions that could make playing a sport unsafe.
- Warm up before you play. Walk, stretch, or simply play at a low-intensity for a few minutes.
- Use the right gear for your sport. That includes wearing the correct shoes and using the right safety equipment.
- Exercise caution when performing motions like twisting, hitting or jumping.
- Do not push your body beyond its conditioning. If you are a beginning runner, set realistic goals your first few weeks – you are not ready to run a marathon after the first week! Start out slow. As you grow stronger and gain more skills, you can gradually increase your intensity level.

If you are injured, there are treatments available, says Bryan Jennings, M.D., an orthopaedic surgeon at Forsyth Medical Center.

Depending on the severity of the injury, treatment may range from remedies you can apply at home (like rest and icing the injured area) to surgery to fix a torn ligament or damaged joint.

Most importantly, do not skip out on rehabilitation. It is vital to the healing process, especially for athletes who want to get back to competing, Jennings says. Rehabilitation may include massage, as well as stretching and strengthening exercises designed to help recover the athlete’s range of motion and strength capabilities so that they can return to the activity or sport they enjoy.

**Information Provided Courtesy of Forsyth Medical Center**