

Martial arts - preventing injury

The many different forms of martial arts include karate, kung fu, ju jitsu, kickboxing, judo and tae kwon do. Martial arts are high-energy activities that can improve cardiovascular fitness, strength, speed and flexibility.

Each sport offers the participant a range of benefits including self-defence and the opportunity to build self-discipline. Most forms of martial arts are suitable for all ages starting from five years, but check with the association of your preferred sport. The risk of injury from martial arts is low compared to other contact sports. Most injuries are to the limbs and are usually mild to moderate such as bruises or cuts.

Common injuries

Most injuries occur when the participant is struck with their opponent's hand or foot. Common injuries include:

- **Skin damage** - such as cuts and bruises.
- **Sprains** - injury to ligaments (the tough bands of connective tissue that hold joints together). A common injury is plantar fasciitis, which is bruising or overstretching of the plantar fascia ligament that runs along the sole of the foot.
- **Strains** - injury to muscle or tendon. For example, a muscle may tear from the rapid stop that occurs when you make contact with an opponent or object.
- **Knee injuries** - caused by the bent-knee stance typical of most martial arts and the use of forceful kicks that can injure the joint if not done properly.
- **Dislocations and fractures** - particularly of the hand, finger, foot and toe.
- **Overuse injuries** - any part of the body can be injured by sheer repetition of movement.

Risk factors

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- **Choice of sport** - karate and kickboxing account for about half of all martial arts injuries in Victoria.
- **Poor technique** - holding or moving the body incorrectly can put unnecessary strain on joints, muscles and ligaments.
- **Using excessive force** - failing to pull a punch or kick can inflict injury on an opponent.
- **Inexperience** - beginners are more likely to get hurt because their bodies are not used to the demands of the sport.
- **Overtraining** - training too much and too often can lead to a wide range of overuse injuries.

General health suggestions

Suggestions include:

- If you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years of age or haven't exercised regularly, see your doctor for a check-up.
- If you are thinking of enrolling your child in a martial arts program, consult with your doctor first. A medical check-up can help identify any particular injury risks your child may have.
- Warm up thoroughly beforehand. Most martial arts disciplines recommend sustained stretching for at least 15 minutes before any kicks or punches are thrown.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after activity.

- Allow time to cool down afterwards. Stretching is an important part of your cool down routine.

General safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Watch a variety of classes first if you're not sure which martial art would be right for you. Most instructors will let you sit in on a class. This will give you a good idea of the demands of each discipline.
- New or novice participants should be involved in an accredited martial arts school to learn appropriate skills and technique.
- Obey all the rules of your martial art.
- Seek advice from your martial arts teacher if you think your techniques need improving.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment like helmets and mouth guards.
- Use your peripheral vision. If you have good hand-to-eye coordination, you are less likely to get hit. See your optometrist for information on how to improve your peripheral vision.
- Try to put the emphasis on fun rather than competition if your child is participating in martial arts.
- Make sure your child understands that playing through pain is wrong.

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Stop immediately if an injury occurs to help prevent further damage.
- Seek prompt treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from your sport.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) with rest, ice, compression, elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and seek advice from a health professional.
- Do not resume activity until you have completely recovered from injury.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Physiotherapist
- Optometrist
- Australian Karate Federation for Victoria Tel. (03) 9726 7312
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

- Most injuries occur when the participant is struck with their opponent's hand or foot.
- Most martial arts disciplines recommend sustained stretching for at least 15 minutes before any kicks or punches are thrown.
- Seek prompt treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from your sport or activity.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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