

## Sports medicine - Q & A

This fact sheet lists a range of questions and answers on sports medicine. The questions were posted by visitors to the Better Health Channel and answered by a panel of experts, which includes general practitioners, nutritionists, physical activity professionals and other health and medical specialists.

### **Q. Is sports medicine claimable on Medicare?**

Seeing a doctor can be claimed on Medicare. Sports physicians who have completed the Australian College of Sports Physicians Fellowship Program are claimable on Medicare. Sports Medicine Australia provides a membership directory so that you can find a sports physician or sports medicine doctor in your area.

You do not need a referral to see a sports physician or a sports medicine doctor. Other disciplines within sports medicine – such as physiotherapy, dietetics and podiatry – cannot be claimed on Medicare, but may be claimable on private health cover. As each private health cover policy is different, it is important that you check the extent of the coverage.

In some circumstances Medicare rebates are available for a maximum of five allied health services each year. Eligible services include physiotherapy, exercise physiology, dietitians and occupational therapists. To qualify you must have a chronic condition, complex care needs and be managed by a GP under an enhanced primary care plan. You should contact Medicare for more information.

### **Q. What weight bearing exercises, including in a gym, would you recommend for someone with mild osteoporosis in the hips?**

You should consult the doctor who diagnosed your mild osteoporosis to determine your level of bone loss. It is also important to identify if the exercise program is to limit bone density loss or to improve muscle strength, balance and coordination.

The doctor may need to consult with your gym to ensure an exercise program is designed for your needs. Another alternative is to ask your doctor to refer you to a physiotherapist or exercise physiologist to develop the exercise program you require.

Issues to consider when prescribing exercises for patients with osteoporosis include:

- **Age** – this determines the aims to be achieved. Younger people can begin an exercise program to promote bone building; this will improve their bone health in the future. For older people, the exercises are designed to limit bone density loss.
- **Degree of osteoporosis** – this will determine the exercises that can be undertaken. In some stages of osteoporosis, aggressive exercises may lead to a risk of fractures.
- **Balance and coordination** – exercise can help to increase muscle strength and improve balance and coordination, which will decrease the likelihood of falls.

### **Q. My 10 year old daughter has complained of a 'stitch' in the abdomen during some of her badminton games. Could you please advise of the cause and suggest a solution?**

The causes of a 'stitch' or exercise-related transient abdominal pain (ETAP) are not clear. Past beliefs have included lack of oxygen to the diaphragm, or stress on the diaphragmatic ligaments supporting internal organs. The condition is most common in activities that involve repetitive movements of the abdominal trunk in an extended position – for example, badminton or tennis.

Generally, the suggested management is to slow down activity slightly and to stretch the side muscles. Drinks that have a higher salt content than the body, sometimes called hypertonic, sports or energy drinks, should also be avoided.

**Q. I have been trying to get fit for ages but all I've done is bulk up my muscles, which has made me bigger but with less fat. This is hindering my sports practice. How can I get rid of this excess muscle?**

When trying to improve fitness, it is important to determine which element of fitness you wish to change. Fitness can be heart and lung fitness, muscle endurance fitness, muscle strength, speed, power or flexibility.

It sounds like you have been working on your strength and power, which will generally increase muscle size. The excess muscle will change if you change your fitness regime – for example, you could decrease the size of weights and increase the repetitions completed (that is, improve your muscle endurance).

It sounds like you need to have your fitness program planned to suit your needs. I would suggest one of the following:

- Ask your gymnasium to rewrite your program, and aim for fitness specific to your sport or health goals, rather than only strength.
- Ask your coach or fitness adviser to design a fitness program.

**Q. I have back pain on my right side and my right heel hurts when I put weight on it, such as when I'm walking. Is this caused by a bulging disc and is there any cure for it?**

Back pain can be caused by many injuries. It is important to determine what is causing your back pain, and whether your heel pain is related or is caused by a different problem.

Injuries to spinal discs may cause pain in the leg or foot; this is known as 'referred pain'. The degree of injury to the disc needs to be determined to decide on the most appropriate treatment.

Although cure is not a good word to use when referring to disc problems, many treatments and exercises are appropriate for this injury. See your doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath for a proper assessment of both injuries to determine what is injured and what treatment is required.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Sports coach
- Sports medicine doctor
- Physiotherapist
- Osteopath
- Go For Your Life Infoline service Tel. 1300 739 899
- Sports Doctors Australia Tel. (02) 6230 4650
- Sports Medicine Australia – Victoria Tel. (03) 9674 8777

**Want to know more?**

Go to More information for support groups, related links and references.

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