

Squash - preventing injury

Squash is an indoor racquet game that is played in a four-walled court. There are over 900 squash facilities throughout Australia. You can enjoy the occasional game of squash, or play competitively.

Since players are active for up to 70 per cent of the game, you need to have a general level of fitness. When you start to play squash, it's best to begin with a modified game (for example racquetball) to develop fitness and skills. While the risk of injury from playing squash isn't as high as in other sports, injuries that do occur tend to be serious.

Common injuries

Squash injuries include:

- **Muscle strains and sprains** - particularly to the arms, legs and lower back. These injuries are often not severe but can limit game performance.
- **Fall injuries** - from falling or slipping on court.
- **Impact injuries** - for example, getting hit with a ball or a racquet or crashing into a wall.
- **Head and eye injuries** - getting hit by a ball or racquet.
- **Heat stress** - symptoms include dizziness and drop in performance.
- **Overuse injuries** - such as tendonitis of the elbow ('tennis elbow').

Risk factors

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

- **Age** - people aged over 40, mainly males, are at risk of injury. This is usually because older players are often in poor physical condition before they play.
- **Poor fitness level** - a general level of fitness is required to play squash.
- **Poor technique** - puts unnecessary strain on joints and muscles; for example, holding the racquet incorrectly can cause stress to the wrist.
- **Lack of protective equipment** - neglecting to wear protective equipment, such as eyewear, can lead to severe eye injuries.
- **Prior injuries** - squash can exacerbate previous injuries, particularly those of the ankle.
- **Time spent playing** - people who compete or play frequently are at high risk of overuse injuries.

General health suggestions

Suggestions include:

- If you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years old or haven't exercised regularly, see your doctor for a check-up.
- Start with a slower game (for example racquetball) before you take up squash; it will help to develop your fitness and skills.
- Maintain fitness levels with aerobic (walking, jogging) and anaerobic activities (for example sprinting).
- Take squash lessons from a qualified coach to develop adequate skills and technique.
- Respect your physical limitations. Don't continue playing when you're fatigued.
- Wear cool clothing that 'breathes', such as cotton.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after the game.
- Have your shoes professionally fitted.
- Warm up thoroughly before playing. Include jogging on the spot and plenty of stretching.

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

General safety suggestions - on court

Suggestions include:

- Use a ball that is appropriate for your skill and fitness level. Squash balls are colour coded to indicate their speed and bounce.
- Don't enter the court when a game is in progress.
- Keep court doors closed when playing.
- Always wear appropriate eye protection that conforms to Australian Standards. Prescription glasses or sunglasses won't protect your eyes.
- Don't stand too close to your opponent.
- Make sure your equipment is maintained in good repair.

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Stop playing immediately if an injury occurs to prevent further damage. Playing through the pain will only aggravate the injury.
- Seek prompt medical treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from squash.
- 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.
- Stop playing immediately if you have symptoms of serious injury (for example heart condition). Get medical treatment if you experience these symptoms.
- Do not resume activity until you have fully recovered from injury.
- Players with a history of joint injury (for example ankle) should seek medical advice about taping or bracing their joint before playing.
- It is important to find the cause of any injury, so you can take steps to address the problem. Lessons will help to improve your technique.

Eye injuries

Squash is a high-risk activity for eye injuries. In severe cases, if the squash ball hits hard enough, it can burst the eyeball, which can result in the loss of the injured eye. Suggestions include:

- Always wear appropriate eye protection that satisfies Australian standards, regardless of your skill or fitness levels.
- See your optometrist for advice on eye protection appropriate to your vision.
- If you have an eye injury, seek urgent medical attention.
- If in doubt about the severity of an eye injury, seek medical attention.
- Sit upright or in a semi-sitting position while waiting for the ambulance.
- To treat a black eye, apply cold compresses to the closed eye. Don't put ice on the eyeball itself.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Optometrist
- Physiotherapist
- Squash facility
- Victorian Squash Federation Tel. (03) 9682 2199
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

- Squash is a popular sport that requires a high level of fitness.
- Always wear appropriate eye protection that conforms to Australian Standards.
- If you incur an injury, seek urgent medical attention.

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

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