
Surfing - preventing injury

Surfing is a very popular sport, with an estimated 18 million surfers globally, covering all age groups. Surfing is regarded as a safe sport, compared to many others, with a low overall risk of injury. Most injuries are not serious.

Common injuries

Surfers most often sustain injuries to the leg, the head and face, the back, and the shoulder and arm. The main cause of injury is contact with a surfer's own board or someone else's board. 'Wiping out' and striking the seabed are also common causes of injury. Common injuries from surfing include:

- Lacerations like cuts and scrapes
- Sprains
- Dislocations and fractures
- Swimmer's ear and surfer's ear.

Preventing injury

To prevent injury, you should:

- Be prepared
- Be aware of the surfing etiquette
- Use the right gear
- Check the environment
- Know yourself and the sport.

Be prepared

Make sure you:

- Warm up before surfing. This may include a general body warm-up followed by suitable stretches.
- Wear sunscreen (30+) at all times.
- Have lessons from an accredited surf school to learn appropriate skills, techniques and water safety if you haven't surfed before.

Be aware of the surfing etiquette

To avoid collisions in the surf, all surfers should practice surfing etiquette. This includes:

- Respecting the rights of other surfers in the water
- Allowing everyone to catch their share of waves
- Having only one surfer on a wave. There is not enough room on waves for more than one surfer and collisions, injury and conflict between surfers can occur.

Use the right gear

Suggestions include:

- Get professional advice when purchasing a surfboard.
- Consider purchasing a board with flexible fins and a blunt nose or protective nose guard.
- Fit existing surfboards with nose guards to minimise injury risk.
- Wear a wetsuit for buoyancy, sun protection and to prevent seabed abrasions.
- Wear leg ropes, especially in large surf.

Check the environment

Make sure you:

- Check the weather and beach conditions before entering the water, to ensure safety.
- Do not surf alone if you are inexperienced.
- Ensure children are supervised at all times by a responsible adult when they are surfing.

Know yourself and the sport

Suggestions include:

- Choose activities suited to your fitness level.
- Know and use the right techniques.
- Know how to use the equipment properly and safely.
- Drink enough water before and after surfing to avoid dehydration.

Respond promptly to injuries

If you or another surfer is injured:

- Stop immediately and seek prompt treatment.
- Have a mobile phone close if possible, in case of emergency.
- Consult a sports medicine professional if you have a previous injury, to ensure you are fit to surf.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Sports physician
- Always call triple zero for an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Physiotherapist
- Australian Physiotherapy Association Tel. (03) 9092 0888
- Life Saving Victoria Tel. (03) 9676 6900
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

- Surfing is regarded as a safe sport, compared to many others, and has a low overall risk of injury. Most injuries are not serious.
- The main cause of injury is contact with a surfer's own board or that of another surfer.
- Being prepared, knowing the right technique and knowing your environment are just some of the safety measures surfers should take.

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

Smartplay

Content on this website is provided for education and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional. Content has been prepared for Victorian residents and wider Australian audiences, and was accurate at the time of publication. Readers should note that, over time, currency and completeness of the information may change. All users are urged to always seek advice from a registered health care professional for diagnosis and answers to their medical questions.

For the latest updates and more information, visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Copyright © 1999/2012 State of Victoria. Reproduced from the Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) at no cost with permission of the Victorian Minister for Health. Unauthorised reproduction and other uses comprised in the copyright are prohibited without permission.