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## Orienteering - preventing injury

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### Summary

- Orienteering involves running or walking while navigating by compass through challenging environments such as bushland.
  - If you are a beginner, participate in orienteering events held in smaller parks and stick to the 'easy' or 'very easy' courses.
  - If lost or injured, stay still and blow your whistle six times at 10 second intervals, repeated every two minutes until help arrives.
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Orienteering involves running or walking while you are navigating (with a compass) through challenging environments such as bushland. Orienteering organisations remove environmental hazards where possible, or clearly signpost them and warn all participants. At each event, you can choose a course ranging from easy to difficult. Instructors are found at each checkpoint.

### Common injuries with orienteering

Common injuries include:

- running injuries – such as shin splints, strains, sprains and blisters
- overuse injuries – although orienteers run on soil rather than concrete or bitumen, they may still be vulnerable to overuse injuries
- impact injuries – from falling on steep, rocky, slippery or loose terrain
- eye injuries – from tree branches (or similar) whipping into the face
- skin injuries – including abrasions, cuts, bruises, insect bites and sunburn.

### Risk factors for injuries with orienteering

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

Lack of physical conditioning – orienteers should make sure they are in good physical condition.

- Inexperience – beginners who are unaccustomed to reading maps and using a compass may get lost, particularly if they choose a course that's beyond their current skill and experience level.
- Poor technique – for example, incorrect running technique can place excessive strain on joints and muscles.
- Lack of appropriate clothing – neglecting to wear protective clothing, such as a long sleeved t-shirt and long pants, can result in injuries to the skin such as cuts from tree branches.

### Recommendations for orienteering

Suggestions include:

- Exercise regularly to keep yourself in good physical condition.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after the event to reduce the risk of dehydration.
- Warm up thoroughly before orienteering. Include plenty of sustained stretches.
- Incorporate stretching into your cool down routine.
- Wear appropriate shoes. Make sure your shoes are comfortable. Don't buy a new pair of shoes and try to 'break them in' during an orienteering event.

### Orienteering safety tips – getting started

Suggestions include:

- Strictly observe all rules, cautions and advice from event staff.
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- Make sure you fill out all the necessary paperwork at registration.
- Participate in orienteering events held in smaller parks and stick to the 'easy' or 'very easy' courses if you are a beginner.
- Carry a whistle. You are required to blow on the whistle if you get injured or seriously lost. The emergency signal is six blasts at 10 second intervals, repeated every two minutes.

### **Safety tips on the track**

Suggestions include:

- Keep in mind that the most direct route is often the hardest. Study the map carefully and choose the most appropriate route for your skill and fitness level.
- Wear a long-sleeved top and long trousers to reduce the risk of cuts and grazes, if you should fall.
- Apply SPF 30+ sunscreen to all exposed skin areas. Reapply regularly. Wear sunglasses if conditions demand.
- Wear a watch to keep track of time.
- Keep your map inside a waterproof bag.
- Observe the items listed in the 'legend' on your map, as this will provide important information about the terrain, features and potential hazards on the course.

### **If you or someone else is lost while orienteering**

Suggestions include:

- Make sure you understand what to do if you get lost or injured. It is recommended that you stay still and continue to blow the distress call according to emergency procedures on the whistle until help arrives.
- Only blow the whistle if you are lost, injured or too exhausted to continue.
- Try to find the hurt or lost competitor if you hear a distress whistle. You **must** abandon your course if you hear a distress whistle.
- Make sure you have basic first aid training. You may be the first person to make contact with an injured orienteer.
- Always return to registration at the end of the event even if you haven't finished the course. If your name isn't ticked off, the organisers will assume you are still somewhere on the course.

### **If you injure yourself while orienteering**

Suggestions include:

- Stop immediately if an injury occurs. Running 'through' the pain will only make your injury worse.
- Seek prompt medical treatment for all injuries.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) according to the RICER approach with Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and Referral –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
- Orienteering Victoria Tel. (03) 8846 4140
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

### **Things to remember**

- Orienteering involves running or walking while navigating by compass through challenging environments such as bushland.
- If you are a beginner, participate in orienteering events held in smaller parks and stick to the 'easy' or 'very

easy' courses.

- If lost or injured, stay still and blow your whistle six times at 10 second intervals, repeated every two minutes until help arrives.

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