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## Tennis – preventing injury

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### Summary

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Tennis is one of the most popular sports in the world. More than one million Australians play each year. Playing tennis is a great way to stay physically fit, and it's also a great way to make new friends.

Tennis requires a variety of physical attributes including speed, power, endurance, strength, balance and specific playing skills. Both competitive and social players should carry out a conditioning and training program to cope with the demands of play and reduce the risk of injury.

While the risk of injury from playing tennis is relatively low compared to other sports, common tennis injuries include injuries to the ankle, knee and wrist.

### Risk factors for tennis injuries

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

- **Incorrect technique** – using the correct serving and stroke action is important to prevent injury, particularly to the elbow and wrist. An incorrect swinging action can be caused by the player relying only on the arm to hit the ball, rather than the body's full strength. The greatest amount of power in tennis can be generated through correct timing of the ball, combined with strength and coordinated rotation of the legs, hips and trunk.
- **Failure to warm up and cool down** – warming up and cooling down is extremely important to reduce the risk of muscle and joint injuries. Warming up will not only help avoid injury but will also improve performance.
- **Time spent playing** – overexertion is one of the most common causes of injury in tennis. Your body needs rest and recovery between training and matches. If you don't allow your body sufficient time to rest and recover, you may not receive the total benefits of your game. You'll also have an increased risk of overuse

injury.

- **Previous injury** – a previous injury can lead to similar injuries in future, particularly if you haven't taken enough time to properly recover.

### **General health and safety suggestions**

Before you take up tennis, keep these suggestions in mind:

- See your doctor for a check-up if you have a medical condition, are overweight, are over 40 years of age or haven't participated in regular physical activity for a long period of time.
- Take lessons from a qualified coach to develop adequate skills and technique.
- Warm up and stretch before you play to improve joint range of motion, promote elasticity of tendons and ligaments, and prevent muscular strain. Good preparation is important.
- Cool down after play to help with your recovery.
- Be Sunsmart. Always wear a t-shirt and hat, and use 30+ sunscreen on exposed skin.
- Drink water before, during and after activity to keep hydrated.

### **Conditioning and fitness tips**

Some further tips include:

- Competitive and recreational players should have a skills development and training program that builds up gradually.
- Players should consult a qualified tennis coach about their individual training requirements.

### **Hot weather and water**

If you play during hot weather you should be aware of the dangers of heat-related illness, including heat stroke. You should:

- Wear 30+ sunscreen, a sun hat and light, protective clothing.
- Consider modifying the format of your play in the event of extreme weather conditions.
- Make sure you replace lost fluids by drinking plenty of fluids before, during and after play.
- Take advantage of breaks in play to rest out of the sun and have a drink.
- Drink two to three glasses half to one hour before exercise.
- Drink one glass every 10 to 15 minutes during exercise.

### **Choose appropriate playing equipment**

The right equipment, kept in good condition, is very important to prevent injury:

- Seek professional help when you choose a racquet and string tension, especially if you've had arm and shoulder problems.
- Consider playing indoors or at another time if court conditions are wet, as a slippery surface and heavy, wet balls may contribute to injuries.
- Choose shoes carefully, preferably with professional advice on the most appropriate shoe for your foot type and for the playing surface on which you play.

### **What to do if an injury occurs**

Clubs should have a well-stocked first aid kit, a supply of ice packs, an accessible telephone and emergency contact numbers on display. If you've been injured, you should:

- Stop playing immediately to prevent further damage. Playing through the pain will only make your injury worse.
- Seek prompt first aid or medical treatment for any injury. This is important for all injured players, regardless of how severe the injury is.
- Get expert advice on appropriate taping or bracing and rehabilitation if you have repeated injuries.
- Don't resume play until you have completely recovered from the injury.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Physiotherapist
- Tennis Australia qualified coach
- Tennis Victoria Tel. (03) 8420 8420
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

## Things to remember

- Consult a qualified tennis coach for your individual training needs.
- During hot weather, be aware of the dangers of heat illness. Make sure you wear a sun hat, apply 30+ sunscreen and drink plenty of fluids.
- Remember to warm up, stretch and cool down after every game.
- Seek prompt treatment for any injury. Early management will mean less time away from your sport or activity.

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