
Surfing - preventing injury

Summary

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 surfing 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 surfing injuries

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 before surfing

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.

Stand up paddling

When stand up paddling, make sure you:

- Try and give other surfers some distance – especially going out through the waves. The size of your equipment can be more dangerous to others than a regular surfboard.

- Catch waves individually (one stand up paddler per wave, one surfer per wave).
- Attach leg rope to boards at all times, not to the paddle.
- Wear a helmet. Helmets are recommended for beginner riders.
- Don't just jump off your board when caught by broken waves. Look around first to make sure all your fellow surfers are safe from your actions.

Use the right surfing 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.
- Do not surf alone if you are inexperienced.
- Make sure children are supervised at all times by a responsible adult when they are surfing.

Know yourself and the sport of surfing

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 surfing 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 make sure you are fit to surf.

Where to get help

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

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