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## Touch football - preventing injury

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### Summary

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Touch football ('touch') was originally a form of training for rugby league players, but it's now a popular sport in its own right. The two teams of up to seven players each score as many tries as they can to win the match. There is no tackling involved. Some research suggests that touch accounts for around 10 per cent of all football injuries. The knee and ankle are the most commonly injured sites.

### Common injuries

Common injuries include:

- **Lower leg** - injuries include sprains, strains, dislocations and fractures of the knee and ankle.
- **Hand** - such as sprains, strains, dislocations and fractures of the fingers.
- **Hamstring** - soft tissue injury to the muscle at the back of the thigh.
- **Head** - injuries include black eye, split lip and concussion.
- **Impact injuries** - from falling over or colliding with another player. For example, the shoulder can be injured from a heavy fall.

### Risk factors

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

- **Certain manoeuvres** - such as diving for the ball, changing direction and touching.
- **Lack of fitness** - a certain level of fitness is required to play touch.
- **Inexperience** - beginners may be more likely to be injured because they do not have the skills or technique to meet the demands of the sport.
- **Poor technique** - holding or moving the body incorrectly can put unnecessary strain on joints, muscles and ligaments.
- **Failure to wear protective equipment** - for example, using mouth guards can reduce the risk of injury.
- **Overtraining** - training too much and too often can lead to a wide range of overuse injuries.

### General health suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Exercise regularly to keep fit.
- Wear shoes appropriate to your sport. Ideally, your shoes should have ribbed soles or moulded cleats.
- Apply SPF 30+ sunscreen to all areas of exposed skin. Reapply regularly.
- Warm up thoroughly before playing. Include plenty of sustained stretches.
- Cool down after activity. Stretching is also an important part of your cool down routine.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after the game.
- Get involved with a club, to enable you to learn the skills and technique associated with touch.

### General safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Develop good skills and technique before playing in competitive games.
- Prepare properly by participating in pre-season training.

- Make sure you are fully aware of and practice the rules of the game.
- Work at improving your form. Ask your coach for tips on how to improve your technique and reduce the risk of injury.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment, such as a mouth guard.

### **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 make your injury worse.
- Seek prompt medical treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from touch.
- 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.
- Do not resume play 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.

### **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Physiotherapist
- The Victorian Touch Association Tel. (03) 9654 2866
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

### **Things to remember**

- Common touch football injuries include sprains, strains, dislocations, fractures and concussion.
- Certain manoeuvres increase the risk of injury, such as diving for the ball, changing direction and touching.
- Ask your coach for tips on how to improve your technique and reduce the risk of injury.

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

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