Soccer (also called football, especially in other countries) is the most popular sport in the world and is played in most countries. It is a team sport, involving 11 players on each side who use their legs, head and torso to pass a ball and score goals. The nature of the game means that players may be sprinting, running fast or slow, and sometimes may be standing around.

As play during soccer is continuous, soccer is great for fitness and cardiovascular health. People of various ages and skill levels can participate in soccer, with those of various sizes being able to do equally well.

Soccer can also be a great sport for kids who may not have high levels of athletic ability, but who would like to participate in team sports. Soccer is ideal for boys, girls, men and women, who play the same game under the same rules and where physically appropriate may play alongside each other.

Health benefits of playing soccer

Soccer can be a great workout and lots of fun. The health benefits include that it:

- increases aerobic capacity and cardiovascular health
- lowers body fat and improves muscle tone
• builds strength, flexibility and endurance
• increases muscle and bone strength
• improves health due to shifts between walking, running and sprinting.

Other benefits of playing soccer

There are many other benefits from playing a team sport like soccer. For example it:
• is generally a non-contact sport
• teaches coordination
• promotes teamwork and sharing
• teaches you to ‘think on the run’
• helps to increase skills in concentration, persistence and self-discipline
• is a great way to meet people and exercise with friends
• can provide an opportunity to increase your confidence and self-esteem, and help to reduce anxiety
• requires very little equipment so it can be played in the backyard or park
• is relatively easy to learn, so beginners can easily join in the fun and play basic soccer for recreation
• is an international sport.

Planning to play soccer

Soccer is very popular in Australia and is played both recreationally and competitively. Playing a basic game of soccer doesn’t require a large number of people or a field. It can be as simple as having a kick with friends.

Playing soccer just for fun can be done in backyards, streets or on beaches. All you need is a ball. You can also play soccer competitively by joining a local club, organised competitions and junior clinics. Some indoor sports centres offer indoor soccer competitions with reduced team sizes.

Avoiding soccer injuries

To protect yourself from injury and prepare your body to play soccer, make sure you:
• Warm up your muscles and joints before starting
• Maintain your fitness to play well and avoid injury or fatigue
• Make sure you have plenty of fluids on hand and rehydrate regularly
• Don’t overdo it – depending on your age and physical condition.
• Wear the correct protective equipment.

Where to get help

• Local council
• Local soccer club
• State soccer federation
• Soccer Federation Australia (with links to state organisations) Tel. (02) 8020 4000
• Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777

Things to remember

• Soccer is a good sport for maintaining health, fitness, strength and endurance.
• You can play with a club, learn through a junior clinic or have a kick with friends.
• Make sure you have plenty of fluids on hand and rehydrate regularly.
• Don’t overdo it. Mix up your physical activity with other low-impact sports.