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Preventing Injury in Football Players

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Injuries are common in American football due to the combination of high speeds and collision contact. They can occur almost anywhere in the body, but data from college athletes shows that ligament sprains of the knee and ankle are the most commonly reported injuries. However, certain player positions may be more prone to injury overall and the type of injury sustained may vary among the positions. While ankle sprains and knee injuries to the anterior or posterior cruciate ligament (ACL/PCL) or to the menisci (cartilage of the knee) are common due to the cutting motion of running players, shoulder injuries to the acromioclavicular joint (ACJ) or labrum (cartilage surrounding shoulder socket) are especially common in running backs and linemen.

In addition, football players are susceptible to concussions, a subject that has garnered a lot of recent media attention. A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury caused by a blow to the head or body, a fall, or other high velocity impact that shakes the brain inside the head causing chemical changes and sometime brain cell damage. Coaches and players should familiarize themselves with the signs and symptoms of concussions, which may include headaches, dizziness, vision changes, nausea, loss of balance, drowsiness, numbness/tingling, and difficulty concentrating.

Not all those who suffer a concussion will lose consciousness, and an athlete

suspected of sustaining a concussion should return to play only after evaluation and clearance by a medical professional.

While traumatic injuries such as concussions and lower extremity injuries are the most common, overuse injuries caused by a player training beyond the body's ability to recover do not receive enough attention. Lower back pain and patellar tendinitis (knee pain) are injuries commonly associated with overtraining syndrome.

Steps to Prevent Common Football Injuries

Sport participation physical

Athletes should have a pre-season health and wellness evaluation by a doctor before participating in any sport.

Warm up, stretch, and cool down

A long and flexible muscle is less prone to injury. Always take time to properly warm up and stretch before any activity and don't neglect stretching after practice as well.

Hydrate

If you have not had enough fluids, your body will not be able to effectively cool itself through sweating and evaporation. The musculoskeletal system is sensitive to changes in our body's water and electrolyte levels, which can also be quickly depleted with excessive sweating. Even mild dehydration can impair athletic performance and may cause cramping, muscle strains or tears.

Proper technique

Learn to tackle with the head up and do not lead with the helmet. Use the front of the shoulder as the main point of contact. Head-first tackling, commonly called spear tackling, not only increases the risk of injury to you and the player being tackled, but it may result in a penalty on the field.

Proper equipment

Make sure your protective gear is the proper size and fit. Always wear a helmet, but you should also wear shoulder pads, hip pads, knee pads, a tail pad, mouthguard, as well as cleated shoes and non-shattering eyewear or contact lenses.

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