



Common rugby injuries

A demanding game

One of the world's most popular sports, rugby is catching on in the United States. USA Rugby reports more than 80,000 registered players, 20,000 of whom are high school age.

Rugby is a demanding game. Athletes are required to run like soccer players and tackle like American football players. Not surprisingly, rugby players sustain their share of injuries. The constant running increases the potential for overuse injuries like tendinitis and bursitis. More common, however, are traumatic injuries. Dislocations, fractures and concussions may occur when players collide with other players or hit the ground while scrumming, rucking and tackling.



Player Safety

Common accidents, serious injuries

Fractures and dislocations Broken bones and dislocated fingers and elbows may occur when a player is tackled or knocked to the ground.

Concussions may result from blows to the head by other players or falls to the ground. Players showing concussion symptoms—headaches, dizziness, nausea—should be removed from the game immediately and they should not resume play until cleared by a medical professional.

Flexor tendon injuries like "jersey finger" are common. Jersey finger occurs when a player grabs another player's jersey and the tendon is pulled off the bone.



Overuse injuries may result from constant running. Rugby players often sustain strains, soreness, tendinitis and bursitis.

Quick changes of direction on the field may cause knee injuries like medial collateral ligament (MCL) and anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) sprains and tears and meniscus tears.

Facial injuries may occur in rugby as players are not required to wear protective masks. Cuts, bruises and facial fractures are possible.

How can you prevent rugby injuries?

- **Conditioning** is critical to withstanding the demands of rugby. Players are encouraged to engage in a training program that emphasizes strength, endurance and flexibility. Also, rugby puts different demands on players depending on the positions they play on the field. Coaches should create position-specific conditioning programs.
- **Practice proper technique when tackling, rucking and scrumming.** For example, tackling in rugby is designed to stop an opponent's forward momentum, control him and, if possible, capture the ball. For this reason, rugby tackling technique is far different from the American football tackling technique of driving through an opponent. Coaches should teach the difference.
- **Wear the right equipment, including a fitted, high quality mouth guard.** Equipment such as headgear, shoulder pads, chest pads and ear guards are not required by most leagues, but they may reduce the risk of injury.
- **Know the rules.** Foul play hurts your team and may increase the risk of injuries. Players and parents are encouraged to seek out leagues and coaches that emphasize good sportsmanship and fair play.
- **If you're hurt, get off the field.** Playing through pain hurts your team and hurts yourself. Don't be a hero.



Rest and Recovery

Rest is the key to recovering from overuse injuries. Soreness, strains and sprains only get better when players stop playing and stop practicing and allow the body time to recover. Rugby players should consider taking time off during the week and between seasons so their bodies can regain strength and flexibility.

Overall conditioning is another important factor in recovery. Simply put: the better shape you're in, the more likely you'll recover from most injuries.

In rugby, training that focuses on strengthening the neck, shoulder, hip and core is recommended.

Workouts that increase the flexibility of the hamstrings and hip flexors may reduce the likelihood of rugby player sustaining an injury in the first place, and it may increase the athlete's ability to recover from that injury. Also, training that increases endurance can help an athlete return to a high level of performance after sustaining an injury.



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This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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