

Avoiding weekend warrior sports injuries

A tennis game on Saturday morning seemed like a great idea, but by Sunday morning pain had taken over your body.

If this sounds familiar, you may be a “weekend warrior”—someone who overexerts themselves on the weekend to compensate for lack of exercise during the workweek. Unfortunately, this can cause injury and pain—enough to sideline you from everyday activities.

But it doesn't have to be this way. You can prepare your body to make your weekend sporting events an enjoyable part of your life instead of one big pain.

Battle scars

Most injuries occur when you're out of shape or when you overexert yourself. Typical injuries include torn rotator cuffs (shoulders), backaches, tennis elbow, knee pain, stress fractures, sprained ankles, pulled hamstrings, head injuries and dislocated joints. Lack of conditioning and overexertion also can cause dehydration and even heart attacks.

A plan for all sports

Sports medicine professionals suggest you try the following tips before you tackle your activity:

- **Follow a balanced fitness program year-round.**

Get in shape to play your sport; don't play your sport to get in shape. You need to condition at least three

months before beginning your sport to build muscle, burn fat and increase stability and endurance. Exercise at least three times a week for 30 to 45 minutes and include aerobic exercise, strength training and stretching.

- **Always warm up, stretch, cool down and stretch again.** Cold muscles are more prone to injury. Warm up with jumping jacks, cycling or running in place for three to five minutes. Next, gently stretch the muscles in your legs, arms, shoulders and back. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds, and never bounce. Toward the end of your activity, slow your speed to cool down gradually. Finish by stretching again to avoid muscle cramps.

- **Invest in good equipment.** Wear proper shoes, arch supports, pads and protective gear specific to your sport.

- **Follow the 10 percent rule.** Increase your activity level by only 10 percent a week. If you're walking 2 miles a day this week, increase it to 2.2 miles next week—not 5 miles. The same rule applies for increasing weights.

- **Listen to your body.** Change your activity level to accommodate your body when it tells you it's had enough.

- **Don't forget water.** Drink at least one glass of water every 15 minutes and avoid alcohol.



Sport by sport

Each sport puts stress on different parts of the body. To get yourself started, be sure to have the proper equipment and consider hiring a trainer for one session to teach you the correct conditioning exercises specific to your sport.

- **Tennis, handball, basketball and football.** Sudden twisting, turning, starting and stopping make these sports tough on your knees, as well as placing stress on your shoulders' rotator cuffs and your forearms, so learn exercises to strengthen all arm, shoulder and neck muscles.

- **Running.** To prepare for running, do appropriate leg-strengthening exercises and invest in proper running shoes. Avoid running on hard surfaces like asphalt and concrete and running uphill, which can aggravate your Achilles tendons.

- **Golf.** Your golf swing requires exercises to develop strength and flexibility in your legs, back, abdomen, hips, shoulders and arms. Be sure you have full range of motion that doesn't cause excessive stress on your muscles or joints.

- **Softball and baseball.** Getting hit by the ball causes the most injuries, so always wear protective gear. Pitchers should also limit themselves to between 80 and 100 pitches a game to avoid overuse injuries of the shoulder.

'Ouch!' Know how to treat pain when it strikes you

Follow these guidelines if you've taken preventive measures but still end up with pain:

- Don't "work through" pain. Pain is your body's way of telling you something is wrong.
- Treat a muscle or a joint injury for a small **PRICE:**

Protect the injury from further damage by using a brace or crutches.

Rest the injured area.

Ice the painful area immediately after the injury.

Compress the area with an elastic wrap or bandage.

Elevate an injured limb above your heart to limit swelling.

- Apply heat to relax a muscle spasm.
- Go to bed early for a few days after an injury. Your body can heal itself best if it gets at least eight hours of sleep a night.

If ice and aspirin or acetaminophen don't relieve your pain at rest or if you still have swelling the day after an injury, call your doctor for an evaluation.