

Common Injuries in Female Athletes

A quick Google search of common injuries among female athletes brings up a list of various possible ailments. However, every list includes some form of a knee injury. The most common injuries are Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) injuries and pain in the front of the knee joint. Why are females more prone to these injuries? According to the University of Colorado Sports Medicine Team, there are several reasons why. Females often have an imbalance of strength between their quadriceps and hamstrings. Females also exhibit functional hip weakness and improper mechanics more commonly than men do.

Improper mechanics are often quite easy to see during a squat. Proper squat form keeps the knee behind but in line with the second toe as the athlete squats down. Females will often move their knees inward and over the second toe when attempting to squat. This indicates weakness of the muscles on the outsides of the hips. Females will also often be unable to control their knee position when landing from any jumping activity. This causes their knees to move forward and inward while landing, which puts them more at risk for an ACL injury. ACL injuries are five times more common in females than males. Knee stability comes from the hip. Therefore, weakness at the hip will present as instability of the knee. A program designed to increase hip strength will go a long way to help prevent knee injuries.

How is this best accomplished? One of my favorite hip exercises is side stepping with a resistance band. The band can be placed above the knees or at the ankles. With the band on tension, step to one side for a distance. Then, repeat to the other side. This exercise won't need to be repeated for very long before the weakness is very apparent! The other exercise I always give my patients is a simple squat, but their form has to be correct. This means sitting the butt back and keeping the knees behind the toes. Again, the knees must stay in line with the foot and not move inward. Chair scoots are an effective way to address hamstring weakness. Simply sit on a stool with wheels and pull yourself across the room by digging your heels into the floor.

Tightness of the band of tissue that runs along the outside of the hip to the knee is very common with any type of knee pain. This band of tissue is called your IT band. One of the best ways to address this tightness is with a foam roller. This is done by rolling the outside of your thigh. Lie on your side with roller under your hip and the other leg crossed in front your body with the foot flat on floor. Support your upper body on your forearm, with your head in line with your spine. Press into your foot and roll down the side of your leg from just below your hip to the side of your knee.

Use of the foam roller along the front of your thighs is also beneficial if you are experiencing knee pain. To roll the front of your legs, support yourself on both forearms

and roll up and down your thighs. A tutorial of foam roller exercises can be found on YouTube. Be prepared for some tender areas while using the foam roller. Continue to roll these areas out like you are rolling dough for several minutes.

Any exercise program wouldn't be complete without including core exercises. Think of your core as abdominal muscles that serve as your natural corset. Your core is incredibly important for proper exercise form and injury prevention. A good way to initiate core exercises is through the dead bug series. Start by lying on your back with your knees bent up. Activate your core by pulling your belly button to your spine and flattening your back into the floor. While holding this contraction, lift one leg up and lift the opposite arm overhead. Slowly lower back to your starting position. Repeat this exercise with your other arm and leg. Be sure to keep your back flat throughout the entire exercise.

Regular exercise is an important component in overall health. However, it is extremely important that you listen to what your body is telling you. Your exercise program should not increase your knee pain. This is a key sign to check your form. It is more beneficial to do 10 exercises the correct way, rather than 25 exercises incorrectly. Also, don't underestimate the importance of a rest day and ice.

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