

Find Your Balance to Prevent Sports Injuries

Overall, a regular workout habit improves your health. One possible drawback? The risk for sprains, torn ligaments and other sports-related aches.

Fortunately, a study of 26,000 athletes uncovered the best way to prevent these injuries. Workout programs focusing on strength and balance reduced the risk for sudden injuries by about 36 percent. Participants were also about half as likely to develop an overuse injury, such as ongoing knee pain.

Why does this work? Strength training builds up your bones, muscles and connective tissue, while balance-building moves reduce your risk of falling. This helps your body withstand the strains of exercise without getting hurt.

Two steps to start your injury-prevention routine:

- 1** Practice strength training twice a week, working all your major muscle groups: legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms.
- 2** Incorporate balance training moves, like walking backward, standing on one leg or standing up from a seated pose.

TIP: If you do sustain an injury, let it heal properly. Returning to play before a muscle, joint or tendon has had time to mend increases your risk of injuring it again.