



MARTIAL ARTS INJURIES

Martial arts are a popular form of exercise and sport worldwide. After soccer, Judo is the most practiced sport in the world. There are hundreds of different styles of martial arts, each being mechanically, philosophically, culturally, and geographically diverse. In the United States there are an estimated 8 million participants in martial arts, with Tae kwon do and Karate being most popular.

What are common martial arts injuries?

Martial arts can result in a wide array of injuries. The injury type is often dependent on the particular form of martial art being performed. Many forms of martial arts are actually non-contact and these tend to result in overuse injuries. Contact martial arts vary widely in their techniques, rules, and protective equipment and these factors affect the injuries and injury rates.

Concussion

Common symptoms of concussion include headache, dizziness, nausea, balance problems, difficulties with concentration, and memory problems. Symptoms can last from several minutes to days, weeks, months, or even longer in some cases. Martial arts that emphasize striking and throwing are more likely to result in concussions. Any athlete with symptoms of concussion should be removed from play and evaluated by a health professional. They should not be allowed to return to play until cleared by a qualified health care professional.

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Head/Eyes/Ear/Nose

Striking and grappling can result in minor injuries such as cuts, bruises and lacerations. More serious injuries, such as fractures of the nose, face, or skull as well as significant injuries of the eyes mouth or teeth can result. These injuries may be minimized by selection of martial arts style, proper training and coaching, and use of protective equipment.

Neck

Minor injuries to the neck, such as bruising and abrasions, are most common. However, some forms of martial arts, such as jujitsu, judo, and mixed martial arts, do allow choking techniques that can result in loss of consciousness. It's important to understand the risks of different forms of martial arts and to learn them under appropriate supervision.

Extremities

Injuries to the extremities include cuts, bruises, sprains, and strains. Fractures and joint dislocations are less common, but can occur, particularly in styles that use throws and joint locking techniques. Injuries can be minimized with proper supervision and the use of appropriate technique.

Skin

Cuts are fairly common injuries in martial arts. Athletes participating in contact sports, such as wrestling and martial arts, can be more prone to developing certain skin infections. These injuries should be evaluated and treated by an appropriate health care professional.

How can martial arts injuries be prevented?

- Have a pre-participation physical exam and clearance evaluation before participating.
- When initially selecting the martial art you plan to participate in, learn the inherent risks with each style of martial art before selecting the one to pursue.
- Always train and practice your martial art under direct supervision from an experienced teacher.
- Perform proper warm-up and cool-down routines.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment in your style of martial art, (i.e., gloves, mouth guard, headgear, chest protector, padding, and/or bracing).
- Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if you have any concerns about injuries or strategies for preventing injuries.

Expert Consultants

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Resources

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