

Preventing Rugby League Injuries



Facts and Safety Tips
for Rugby League



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References

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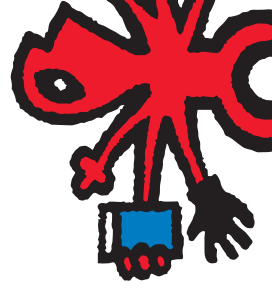
Photos courtesy of Australian Rugby League Development.

Other safety tips

- Eat a well-balanced diet.
- Drink water before, during and after play.
- Play within your limits.
- Be sunsmart. Wear sun protective clothing, SPF 30+ sunscreen and a hat.
- Do NOT play in extreme heat or wet/cold conditions.
- Qualified first aid personnel, first aid kits, ice packs and a stretcher should be available at all times.
- Telephone access, to contact emergency services, and emergency contact phone numbers should be available at all games and training sessions.

If an injury occurs

- Stop playing if you experience an injury or illness.
- Injured players should seek prompt attention from qualified first aid personnel or a sports medicine professional.
- Injuries should be fully rehabilitated before returning to play.



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Facts on Rugby League injuries

Rugby League is a highly physical contact team sport played in Australia and internationally, at all levels.

Statistics from the Australian Sports Commission's 2006 survey showed an estimated 209,800 Australians aged 15 years and older played Rugby League in the 12 months prior to being surveyed. The majority of players were male (88%), aged 15 to 24 years (73%) who played in New South Wales and Queensland (87%) as part of organised sporting activity (75%).

Rugby League involves players accelerating, decelerating, changing direction, tackling, passing and catching the ball by hand, and kicking. Due to the speed and contact nature of the game, injuries can and do occur.

How many injuries?

- From 2002-2003, 1,612 people were admitted to hospitals across Australia for Rugby League injuries, at a rate of 678 injured persons per 100,000 Rugby League players.
- During this period, the hospitalisation rate per 100,000 participants was highest among 25 to 34 year olds and five times higher in males.
- Recent studies show that there is a very small risk of injury to junior Rugby League players in the 6 to 11 year age group, with an injury rate of 4.1 injuries per 1,000 playing hours.
- The incidence of Rugby League injuries is increased as playing level is increased, in particular in the more professional and competitive levels of play.
- Injury rates are lower in training than in matches.

The causes and types of injuries

- The most common cause of injury is striking or colliding with another player, followed by falls.
- Injuries to the lower limb (knee, ankle, thigh, calf) are most common.
- Common types of injuries are musculoskeletal bruising and strains (30% of all injuries) and joint/ligament sprains (20%).
- More serious injuries such as fractures (8% to 20%) and concussion (7%) are less common.

Factors increasing your injury risk

- Feeling fatigued.
- Not wearing protective equipment.
- Poor physical conditioning, lack of training and sprinting speed.
- Lack of the correct Rugby League skills and techniques – particularly tackling and side stepping techniques.
- Previous injuries.
- Poor rehabilitation from previous injuries.

Safety tips for Rugby League

Good preparation is important

- Avoid playing with a pre-existing illness or injury. If in doubt, talk to your doctor.
- Always warm up, stretch and cool down.
- Undertake a training program to develop skills and techniques before competition.
- Undergo a fitness program to develop endurance, strength, balance, coordination and flexibility.
- Train smarter, not harder – include game-based activities and drills in training and avoid excessive fitness activities that are not game-related.

Good technique and practices

will help prevent injury

- Know the rules and play fairly.
- Instruction on correct tackling technique, including falling, should be available across all levels of play.
- Coaches/officials should be appropriately qualified.
- Officials should enforce game rules.



Use appropriate equipment and make the environment safe

- All organisers of Rugby League matches and training should be aware of, and adhere to, the safety policies and guidelines of the Australian Rugby League (ARL), the National Rugby League (NRL), and their governing state and regional bodies.
- Clubs and schools should develop, implement and monitor sports safety risk management plans to manage injury risks.
- Players should use equipment appropriate to their age and stage of physical and skill development.
- Check and maintain club facilities and the playing surface to ensure they are in good condition and free of hazards.
- Australian Rugby League policy states that a qualified First Aid Officer must be present at every ground, and all water runners who enter the field must have a League Safe qualification as a minimum.

Wear the right protective equipment

- Wear a mouthguard, preferably custom-fitted, at all times.
- Wear protective headgear to prevent lacerations and abrasions. Be aware though that the risks of concussion will not be reduced.
- Consider preventive ankle taping and bracing to reduce injury risks.
- Seek professional advice on footwear.
- Protective equipment should cater to an individual's size, age and level of play.

Modify rules and equipment for children

- Group children of similar ages, strength, skill and experience in competition and training to avoid injury.
- Encourage children and beginners to play modified versions of Rugby League (Mini Footy and Mod League) to develop good skills and correct technique.
- Ensure all junior games are played in accordance with the ARL Safe Play Code.