

Preventing sports injuries

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(HealthDay)—Simple steps can help keep you from being sidelined by a sports injury.

First, make it a rule to bookend every workout with a warm-up and a cool-down. The warm-up is meant to increase your heart rate and [blood flow](#) to muscles. Start with some light cardio, like [brisk walking](#), for your warm-up.

After 3 to 10 minutes, focus on increasing flexibility in the muscles you'll use during your workout by stretching them through a full range of motion. Dynamic stretches better prepare the body for activity than traditional [static stretching](#). Gently move into each stretch and hold for a 1-to-2 count, and then release. Repeat for 4-to-6 reps per stretch.

After your workout, the cool-down should bring your body back to the starting point. If you've been doing cardio, do 10 minutes of the activity at a slow and easy pace, then include static stretching, focusing on trouble areas like hips and hamstrings. This helps prevent soreness and starts the recovery process.

To prevent injury when beginning a new activity, start slow. Don't dive in too quickly even if you're in generally good shape. Do expect to feel some soreness if the activity taps into muscles that you don't regularly use. With consistency, your body will adjust, and any soreness should fade away.

Whatever the [activity](#), you'll want to gradually increase both the length and intensity of the workouts.

Other steps to prevent injury are to always use any recommended safety equipment and inspect your gear often. Replace running shoes every 300 miles.

Finally, listen to your body. Don't ignore little aches and pains, or they could turn into big problems.

More information: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons has more [safe exercise guidelines](#), including risk factors to avoid.

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