

THINKFIRST CANADA'S SOCCER INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

Soccer is the most popular team sport worldwide and there are more than 200 million participants registered with the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). As the popularity of soccer grows, so does the incidence of injury. Soccer poses many of the same risks as other sports played on an open field; however the use of the head and the feet to advance the ball introduce avenues of injury unique to soccer. Here are ThinkFirst Canada's top tips for reducing your risk of sustaining a catastrophic injury while playing soccer. This information is taken from Chapter 37 "Soccer" in the ThinkFirst book entitled *Catastrophic Injuries in Sports and Recreation: Causes and Prevention – A Canadian Study* edited by Charles H. Tator and published by the University of Toronto Press in 2008.

TOP TIPS:

- Match young soccer players according to their level of physical development and place young girls and young boys on separate teams.
- Learn the proper technique of heading a soccer ball. The age at which heading can safely be introduced remains controversial. An experienced coach is best suited to judge when to introduce heading in youth soccer. ThinkFirst Foundation of Canada recommends not permitting heading until age 10-12 years.
- Use plastic coated balls. Replace once their water-resistant qualities are lost. The use of smaller balls in youth soccer is strongly recommended.
- Keep the playing surface well maintained. Fill holes in the field and reseed bare spots.
- Wear a mouth guard as they protect from dentoalveolar injuries.
- Shin guards should be compulsory at soccer games and practice sessions. They should have sufficient shock-absorption capacity and cover a large area of the lower leg.
- Wear shoes with moulded cleats or ribbed soles. Shoes with screw-in cleats should be used when traction is required, such as on a wet field with high grass.
- Adequately pad all goalposts and secure them to the ground. When not in use, dismantle portable goalposts, remove and tie up or secure to a permanent structure.
- Consider wearing protective eyewear. We recommend eyewear made of polycarbonate lenses.





- Warm-up, stretch, and cool-down before and after games and practices. The American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons recommends warming up with jumping jacks, stationary cycling, running or walking in place for 3 to 5 minutes. This should then be followed by slow and gentle stretching, holding each stretch for 30 seconds.
- Players must undergo complete rehabilitation before returning to play after an injury. Taping and bracing may be used to help prevent re-injuries of the ankle.
- Strictly enforce existing rules to prevent aggressive behaviour and infractions. Parents, coaches, and soccer organizations should work together to encourage sportsmanship and fair play.
- Personnel knowledgeable in first aid should be present at all sporting events, and appropriate planning for possible emergency situations must be in place.
- For more insight read "Playing Smart Soccer" which can be downloaded at <http://thinkfirst.ca/downloads/resources/ThinkFirst-SmartSoccer.pdf>.

Remember: thinkfirst.ca before you play!