

The background of the entire page is a close-up photograph of a soccer cleat and a soccer ball. The cleat is dark-colored with prominent studs (cleats) on the soleplate. The soccer ball is white with black panels. The image is slightly blurred and has a blue tint, giving it a professional, athletic feel.

Midwest PodiatryTM Centers

Guide to Foot & Ankle

Sports Injuries

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Introduction

Whether young or old, pro or just playing around, no one is ever 100% free from the risk of a sports injury. You can (and should!) take steps to reduce your risks, but you might still end up with a problem anyway. That's a part of life that sometimes simply can't be controlled.

But what you can control is what you do if a sports injury does occur. The choices you make for personal care and professional treatment can have a significant impact on not only the speed of your recovery, but your chances of suffering a similar problem in the future as well.

What We're Here to Do

One of the main fears we hear from our sports injury patients is that they're worried we will tell them they have to give up their active ambitions to find any relief from their condition.

That is **never** our go-to recommendation at Midwest Podiatry Centers, and for very good reason!

Every podiatrist wants their patients to enjoy active lifestyles. Physical activity that is performed and enjoyed has a host of benefits for the feet and ankles – from strengthening and conditioning the structures themselves to maintaining good circulatory health to the area. It's also just plain good for the spirit, as well.

Our goal for treating sports injuries is always **to get you back to moving comfortably and safely as soon as possible**. Yes, that might mean an unavoidable period of rest and/or reduced activity, but that is only a temporary measure to help you achieve better results that should last you well into the future.

Ignoring painful problems, on the other hand, almost always ends up being counterproductive. You may be more active in the short term, but at a much greater risk of your injury becoming longer-lasting and leading to further complications down the road.

We don't want that for you, or for anyone else. That's why we created this guide.

How to Use This Guide

This sports injury guide is intended to help you:

- Learn about and help identify potential sports injuries
- Know what to do if you suspect a foot or ankle sports injury
- Understand the ways in which sports injuries may be professionally treated

It is important to understand that this guide is to be used as a basic reference only. **It is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis.**

We highly recommend calling us for any suspected foot or ankle sports injury in need of attention. It is always important that we confirm any suspected sports injury as well as identify any and all underlying causes. In doing so, we can more directly address factors that might otherwise be overlooked, making recovery more effective and lowering the risk of future injuries.

Common Types of Sports Injuries

Sports injuries can happen in many ways. There are many ways our feet and ankles can move, which unfortunately means many ways an injury can occur.

If we were to sort most injuries into two broad categories, however, it would be these:

Acute Trauma. You take a big hit. You land wrong. You badly roll or twist something. Any injury that occurs due to a severe and sudden force on the body can fit here. These are almost always accidents.

Overuse. When you physically push your body more intensely than you are conditioned to endure, an injury can occur. Overuse injuries can happen somewhat suddenly (such as from taking off into a sprint or jumping from the couch into a full-bore soccer match) or be the result of sustained, repetitive impacts over time without providing the body enough time and opportunity to recover (often seen in distance running).



Given these definitions, a number of different conditions can fall under the category of “sports injury.” It does not always have to be a pronounced trauma. Conditions that result in the development of persistent pain and discomfort also qualify and should absolutely be evaluated.

We will now consider some specific conditions. Please note that not all listed symptoms are always present in each case. Additionally, if your foot and ankle symptoms do not seem to align with anything presented here, that does not mean you don’t have a problem in need of attention! Please contact us and let us help you identify what’s going on.

Ankle Sprain

Arguably one of the most common injuries humans experience, an ankle sprain occurs when one or more of the ligaments surrounding the ankle joint become overstretched or torn. This is typically the result of the ankle twisting or rolling beyond its normal range of motion.

Symptoms:

- Pain and tenderness – particularly when bearing weight on the injury
- Swelling
- Bruising
- An unstable or “weak” ankle
- Limited range of motion
- A “pop” heard or felt at the time of injury

Ankle sprains have different grades based on the severity of damage, but even what is believed to be a relatively minor injury is always still worth an evaluation. Sprains that do not heal properly can increase risk of instability and further injury in the future.

Stress Fractures

As opposed to a simple fracture, in which a clean break is made throughout the bone, a stress fracture creates hairline cracks along the bone’s surface.

Stress fractures typically result from overuse due to repetitive stresses. These impacts cause the bone to weaken and break down on a cellular level, which is normally not a problem as the body rebuilds stronger with enough rest. If not enough rest is provided, however, the rate of breakdown outpaces recovery, and stress fractures eventually form.

Symptoms:

- Pain and tenderness – typically at a specific point along a bone
- Pain that rises after starting an activity and improves with rest
- A dull ache that gradually becomes deeper and sharper over time as the injury worsens

Foot & Ankle Fractures

A broken bone is an injury that almost always requires prompt medical attention. Sometimes, however, it can be difficult to determine whether an injury is a fracture or a severe sprain.

Symptoms:

- Intense pain
- Numbness and tingling
- Swelling
- Bruising
- Significant to complete inability to move the area (and you should not continue to try)
- A misshapen appearance to the injured area

Whether you suspect a fracture or a severe sprain, both are conditions that should receive prompt evaluation. Please do not hesitate to call us as soon as possible.

Neuroma

A neuroma refers to the thickening of tissue around a nerve in response to stress or irritation. A common form of this condition found in the foot is Morton's neuroma, which typically affects the area between the third and fourth toes.

Symptoms:

- Feeling a presence in the ball of your foot, as if you are standing on a small stone that isn't there
- A "burning" pain in the ball of the foot and/or toes
- Tingling or numbness in the toes

A neuroma is not cancerous. Addressing the causes of stress to the area can often relieve the condition.



Achilles Tendinitis

The Achilles tendon is the largest and strongest tendon in the body, connecting the heel bone to the calf muscles. But it can (and does) still experience inflammation and injury from overuse.

Symptoms:

- Pain that occurs after running or other leg-intensive activities, just above the heel or slightly higher up the back of the leg
- Tenderness
- Stiffness
- Pain that worsens after longer periods of running, running up hills, or climbing stairs

More severe injuries to the Achilles can result in partial or complete tears of the tendon. A history of untreated tendinitis can contribute to a higher risk of an Achilles tendon tear or rupture.

Bursitis

Fluid-filled sacs called bursae exist around many bones to cushion and lubricate them during motion. The ankle has a bursae between the heel bone and Achilles tendon, which can become inflamed through overuse and poorly fitting footwear, among other reasons.

Symptoms:

- Swelling along the top of the heel bone
- Pain when squeezing the back of the heel or flexing the foot
- Pain when shifting weight toward the front of your feet or the back of your heels
- Redness

Plantar Fasciitis

Plantar fasciitis is one of the most common causes of heel pain, and can have many factors influencing its development. Overuse is one of them, making this condition common among people with active lifestyles.

This condition concerns the plantar fascia, a thick band of tissue that runs between the base of the toes and the heel bone, helping to form the arch along the way. Excess stress on the plantar fascia can cause tiny tears within the tissue, leading to pain and aggravation along the underside of the heel.

Symptoms:

- Dull or sharp pain in or around the bottom of the heel, often at its worst when getting up in the morning or moving after a long period of inactivity
- Pain tends to occur more often after activity than during it

Treating a Sports Injury

Remember that how you respond to a sports injury can greatly influence your recovery and future performance.

The worst thing you can do when you start to feel pain is nothing. Pain is the body's way of telling you to slow down and listen to it. We always recommend that you stop and assess your situation instead of trying to continue your game or workout. Do not try to "push through." Stop your activity at once if you are in considerable pain or feeling unstable, or if pain is persistent.

First Steps: RICE Therapy

RICE therapy is an appropriate first aid, at-home treatment for many sports injuries. Following this protocol the first 48 hours following an injury can have an effect on reducing pain and swelling.

PLEASE NOTE: If we or another medical professional provides advice or treatment that goes against the elements of RICE therapy, follow that advice or treatment instead. Different situations may require different approaches to care.

RICE stands for:

- **REST.** Keep weight off the injured foot or ankle as much as possible.
- **ICE.** Apply a cold pack to the injured area for 12-15 minutes, several times per day. Always make sure that the source of cold never directly comes into contact with your skin. Wrap it in a thin cloth to prevent damage to the skin, and do not expose yourself to the source of cold for an extended period of time.
- **COMPRESSION.** Wrap the area properly with an elastic bandage, such as an Ace bandage. Do not wrap too tightly, and loosen the bandage if you experience additional pain or swelling. If you are not confident in your ability to wrap and do not have someone who can do it for you, this step can be skipped.
- **ELEVATION.** Keep the injured area above the level of your heart whenever you are sitting or lying down. Propping your leg up on a coffee table, leaning back in a recliner, or propping your foot up on some pillows in bed are all good examples.

RICE therapy is typically not recommended for more than 48 hours.

You also do not have to wait until after RICE therapy has concluded to contact us regarding any sort of foot or ankle problem. Never hesitate to call us whenever you have any concerns or uncertainties!



Professional Sports Injury Treatment

We will never dismiss any call to us seeking help for a foot or ankle sports injury. In fact, we wish more people would report their injuries to us.

It is easy to underestimate just how much damage an injury has caused. And while it is true that some injuries can be treated well at home, even what is thought to be a minor problem can lead to future complications if it is not resolved properly.

We may not always tell you to come in for a minor injury, but we can advise you on how to best approach care and what to watch for. We'll also have a record of your injury to help us in case a future complication does arise.

If we do recommend an appointment, we will begin with a full physical evaluation and a review of the circumstances that surround your sports injury. Answers to the following questions can be helpful:

- When did you first notice symptoms? (Acute injuries will naturally be easier to pinpoint.)
- If the problem has been persistent, have symptoms become more severe, less severe, or about the same over time?
- Are there certain times or activities when your symptoms are at their worst?

If you have an old pair of shoes you typically use for activities, please bring them in as well. We can learn much about your gait and the structure of your feet by reviewing their wear patterns.

Once we have enough information about your sports injury and the factors influencing it, we can recommend a course of treatment to get you back to full action as quickly and as safely as possible.

We will always pursue conservative, non-surgical treatments if we believe they can provide an effective solution. Surgery is only ever considered if other means have not or clearly would not provide the results you are looking for.

A treatment plan can consist of one or many parts, and each is developed on a case-by-case basis to best suit the individual needs of each patient. Parts of a plan might comprise, but are not limited to:

- **Continued rest or reductions in activity.** We do not want to call for a complete cessation of activity, whenever possible. We can work with you to build an exercise plan that can keep you moving during recovery without placing excess stress on vulnerable areas.
- **Making changes to footwear and/or workout routines.** Adjusting to more accommodating footwear or routines that allow for more recovery can make a significant difference. We can also discuss appropriate stretching and warm-up routines to help further condition areas as needed.
- **Prescribing custom orthotics.** Sometimes more exact cushioning and support are needed than a simple change in footwear can provide. In these cases, custom orthotics may greatly help provide relief and better opportunity for recovery.
- **Conducting laser therapy.** Laser therapy sessions provided in office can stimulate the body's natural healing responses, accelerating recovery and reducing pain and inflammation. Laser therapy tends to be most effective on soft tissue injuries, including Achilles tendinitis and plantar fasciitis.

Remember that the overall goal of treatment is not only to provide relief from symptoms, but to reduce the risk of them returning as much as possible.

Preventing Sports Injuries

While prompt and thorough treatment of sports injuries is the best way to ensure they don't pose further problems, it's even better when sports injuries never happens in the first place.

You can't always prevent trouble – especially from acute traumas – but steps to reduce your overall sports injury risk are always worth taking.

The following advice can help you avoid injury, and can help ensure that the injuries that do occur are less severe.



Use Proper, Well-Fitting Footwear

Use only footwear designed for your activities. Walking shoes or standard “sneakers” should never be used for running, for example, nor should running shoes be used for basketball, tennis, or other sports.

Each piece of sport-specific footwear is designed to handle the demands of that activity, whether that includes repetitive impacts, quick pivots, or other forces.

Shoes should always fit your feet properly, and be replaced before they become too worn out. If you're starting to feel some aches after activities, old shoes might be to blame.

Warm Up Dynamically Before Intense Activity

Taking time to warm up helps your body prepare for the demands it will soon face, helping to lower the risk of an overuse injury.

While holding static stretches might be what first comes to mind for a warm-up, a more useful alternative incorporates more dynamic motion. Light jogging, walking lunges, and knee-highs tend to be good examples, and we can help you create a regimen that best fits your activity levels and needs.

Gradually Build Up Intensity

We know it can be exciting to dive into a new activity with all you got, but that is an easy way to end up hurt.

Any new activity should start at a relatively low intensity. Week by week, you can increase your intensity by around 10% in terms of time, weight, or distance. This will help keep your body challenged to improve with a lower risk of an injury.

However, do not become strictly focused on 10% improvement each week. If your body feels fatigued or weak after an increase, dial down that intensity to something more manageable. Listen to what your body is trying to tell you.

Cross-Train and Incorporate Rest Days

Going all out in one specific way all the time not only increases injury risk, but also sacrifices your body's overall strength and performance as well.

Cross-training will give areas of your body more time to rest during lower-intensity activities, while building other areas of focus. It is a sound, holistic approach to fitness.

Depending on your needs and activity levels, it may still be wise to build full rest days into a plan as well. Speak with us, your primary care physician, or a certified fitness expert for further advice.

Focus on Technique

There is a right way and a wrong way to do everything – especially forms of sport and exercise.

Proper technique is designed not only for best results, but optimal safety as well. You can't really do something best if you're hurt, after all.

Conclusion: Good Sports Injury Care Now, Better Performance in the Future

Sports injuries are sometimes just a part of being active, but don't treat them as an obstacle to overcome through sheer will. You will lose every time.

Knowing your body and caring for sports injuries properly will help you stay active much longer, and the experts at Midwest Podiatry Centers are here to help you anytime you ever have questions, concerns, or a need for professional treatment.

If there is anything this guide has not addressed for you, please do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to hear from you.



Start Your Journey Toward Healing

Check out one of our offices!

Blaine | Richfield | St. Anthony | Minneapolis | Plymouth
Minnetonka | Edina | Maple Grove | Burnsville