

- ▶ Games for children and adolescents should be played in accordance with the National Junior Football Policy established by the Australian Football Foundation.
- ▶ All players should ensure that they remain hydrated during the game by drinking water or a sports drink during every break.
- ▶ Officials should use the “send-off” rule to discourage and deter illegal and potentially injurious play.
- ▶ Umpires should strictly enforce the rules of the game at all levels.
- ▶ All bleeding players should be removed from the playing field until the risk of further bleeding is controlled.
- ▶ All clubs should have qualified trainers or first aiders on-site to provide initial management of injuries that occur on the field.
- ▶ Injured players requiring further treatment should seek prompt medical attention for their injury.
- ▶ Advice from the injured player’s treating health professional should always be sought before a decision about return to play is made.

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Photograph of Carlton Football Club players courtesy of Deakin University.

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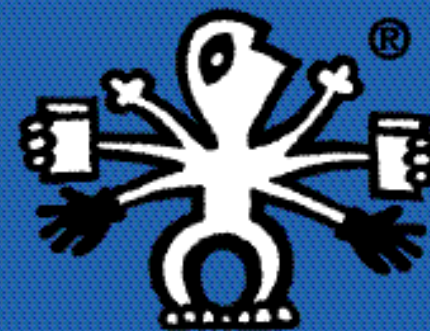
Victorian Football League
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Reference

Gabbe B, Finch C, Schokman P & Parkin D.
Tackling Australian Football Injuries – A Review of the Literature. Research Report No. 98003. School of Human Movement, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, July 1998.

- ▶ *Stretching before play*



SMARTPLAY

Facts and
safety tips for

**AUSTRALIAN
FOOTBALL**



PREVENTING AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL INJURIES



Facts about Australian football injuries

The game of Australian football

- ▶ Australian football is one of the most popular sports in Australia. It is also the most popular spectator sport in this country.
- ▶ Australian football is a full body, contact running sport. Tackling, kicking, running, handballing, marking and constant physical competition for the ball are features of the game.
- ▶ The majority of players are male and the game is played by people of all ages.
- ▶ Competitions are played across junior to adult community levels, and to elite (AFL) matches.
- ▶ The majority of participants play at the community level of participation.

Common injuries during Australian football

- ▶ Australian football is associated with a large proportion of medically-treated sports injury cases.
- ▶ The majority of injuries are to the lower limb.
- ▶ Upper limb injuries are also common to children and community level participants.
- ▶ Head injuries also occur and are potentially serious.
- ▶ The complexity, speed and physical nature of the game can place players at risk of injury.
- ▶ Low levels of general fitness and conditioning contribute to the high risk of injury.
- ▶ Overuse injuries are common to high level players.
- ▶ Collision type injuries are also common, particularly to children and community level players.

Players at risk of injury

There are four main groups of players at particular risk of sustaining an Australian football injury:

- ▶ Elite players, including professional, semi-professional and elite juniors.

- ▶ Children and adolescents in organised competition.
- ▶ Formal adult competitors at the amateur or community level.
- ▶ Recreational/social or non-competitive players.

Safety tips for Australian football

Many football injuries can be prevented by players, coaches, officials and clubs. Giving priority attention to safety issues will also improve performance in Australian football. The following safety tips apply to all players, irrespective of the level at which they play.

Pre-season safety

- ▶ All competitive players should undertake appropriate pre-season conditioning. Advice about the content of the pre-season training program should be sought from a coach or fitness advisor.
- ▶ All players should develop football skills and good technique before playing in competitive games.
- ▶ Children and new participants should undergo a pre-participation medical screening examination with a qualified and experienced practitioner.
- ▶ Older players (aged >35 years) should routinely undergo pre-participation medical screening before playing.

Pre-game safety

- ▶ All players should warm-up for about 20 minutes before a game. This should include stretching to increase flexibility and slow jogging which progresses to more intense running activities, with and without a football.
- ▶ Players should have a balanced, nutritional diet.
- ▶ Players should ensure that they are adequately hydrated (i.e. had enough water) before a game.
- ▶ Players should avoid alcohol consumption 48 hours before the game.
- ▶ Players should seek professional advice about the most appropriate boots to wear for their playing conditions.

- ▶ Players should apply sunscreen and reapply it during breaks in play on sunny days.
- ▶ All players should make sure that they are fully aware of the rules of the game, particularly as they relate to safety.

Providing a safe environment

There are a number of safety precautions that can be undertaken to provide a safe playing environment for all players.

- ▶ All grounds should be checked thoroughly before the start of any game. Any potential injurious objects (e.g. broken glass or sprinkler heads) should be removed or covered.
- ▶ All cricket pitches should be covered sufficiently with a soft surface before playing on them.
- ▶ Fences should be a minimum of 3 metres from the boundary line.
- ▶ All goal posts should be padded with high density foam to at least 2 metres high and 35 mm thickness.
- ▶ All goal post padding should be in good repair and replaced when worn or damaged.
- ▶ Where possible, games that are cancelled due to unacceptable weather should be rescheduled.
- ▶ A stretcher should be present by the side of the playing field for all matches.
- ▶ All clubs should have appropriate access to a telephone for emergency services.

Safety during the game

- ▶ All players, including children, should wear a mouthguard at all times during both training and competition. If possible, players should wear custom-made mouthguards.
- ▶ Players with a history of head injury should seek professional advice about the appropriateness of headgear.
- ▶ Players with a history of ankle injury should wear some form of external ankle support, e.g. taping.
- ▶ Thigh protectors may be useful for players who have suffered a recent cork thigh or those with a history of significant cork thighs.