

Modify rules for children

- Juniors should be matched for competition on physical maturity and skill level.
- Encourage children to take part in TeeBall to develop good skills and techniques.
- Older children should participate in modified softball as promoted by the Australian Sports Commission and Softball Australia.

Other safety tips

- Drink water before, during and after play.
- Play within your limits.
- Be sunsmart to avoid heat illness. Wear sun protective clothing, sunglasses, SPF 30+ sunscreen and a hat.
- In hot weather, follow Sports Medicine Australia's *Hot Weather Guidelines*.
- Do NOT play in extreme weather 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, is essential.

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.
- Players should be fully rehabilitated before returning to play.



For further information contact

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References

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Acknowledgments

Smartplay is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.
This fact sheet has been reprinted with the permission of the Department of Planning and Community Development and VicHealth.
Prepared by Monash University Accident Research Centre, November 1996. Updated and reprinted 2008.

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Preventing Softball Injuries



Facts and Safety Tips for Softball

Facts on softball injuries

Softball is a sport played by all ages and skill levels throughout Australia. A direct descendant of baseball, the rules of both sports are very similar.

In 2008, statistics recorded 38,000 registered softball participants across the country.

Softball is a high-tempo, low scoring game, predominately played by women in Australia. It is a game that requires players to pitch, run between bases, field and bat. Due to the game's requirements on players' physical and technical skills, injuries can sometimes occur.

How many injuries?

- In 2006, 18 people were admitted to Victorian hospitals while 63 people visited emergency departments for softball-related injuries.
- During this period, the hospitalisation and emergency department rate was highest among those aged between 10 and 14 years.

The causes and types of injuries

- Common causes of injuries in children are falls, being hit by the ball, misjudging catches, being hit by the bat and overexertion.
- Common causes of injuries in adults are running between bases, particularly involving sliding to base, overexertion while running between bases, catching the ball and being hit by the ball.
- Impact with standard stationary bases while sliding incorrectly to base can cause serious hand and foot injuries.
- Common types of injuries are fractures and sprains/strains.
- Injuries to the knee and lower leg, wrist/hand/fingers and face are most common.
- Shoulder and elbow injuries are also common as a result of throwing, related to a number of factors including poor technique, overuse, inappropriate progression of throwing (hardening), or throwing too far, too much or too hard.

Safety tips for softball

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 pre-season stretching and strengthening programs to help prevent overuse injuries associated with pitching.
- Undertake fitness programs to develop flexibility, endurance and strength.
- Start throwing over short distances in pre-season and gradually increase the distance, intensity and number of throws in any one session and the number of throwing sessions per week.

Good technique and practices will help prevent injury

- Know the rules and play fairly.
- Seek instruction from a qualified coach to develop correct pitching and throwing techniques.
- Practise correct throwing techniques every time you throw with particular emphasis on the arm cocking position and follow-through, as these aspects are most associated with injury.
- Coaches should limit the number of pitches and field throws per week for each player.
- Coaches should undertake regular reaccreditation and education to ensure their knowledge is kept up-to-date.
- Officials should enforce game rules.



Use appropriate equipment and make the environment safe

- Use equipment appropriate to age and stage of development.
- Use breakaway/quick release bases instead of standard stationary bases to reduce the load impact generated should a player impact with the base. Standard bases are not designed to absorb the force of a sliding player and can cause serious injuries to the hands and feet upon impact. An American study has estimated that the use of breakaway bases could represent a 96% reduction in the risk of injury involved with sliding.
- Use softer balls to reduce the risk of injury.
- Pad fences, walls and posts to help prevent injury if players run into them when attempting to catch the ball.
- Use protective screening to protect players in dugouts and on benches.
- Ensure playing fields and facilities are well maintained and free of hazards.
- In hot weather, lengthen the time between innings to allow drink breaks. If necessary, games should be shortened or cancelled.
- During hot weather, officials should encourage players to remove their socks, shin guards and shoes, and wear light sandals between games to allow the skin to breathe and reduce the risk of blisters and shin rash.

Wear the right protective equipment

- Wear a mouthguard, preferably custom-fitted, at all times.
- Wear a good quality, double eared helmet with a face protector.
- All players, particularly infielders, should wear high quality hockey-style shin guards at all times.
- Wear shin guards, a breast plate and a helmet with a mask when playing in the catcher's position.
- Children should wear a properly fitted genital protector at all times.
- Always wear two pairs of socks in hot weather to reduce blisters.
- Seek professional advice on footwear.