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The National Game



Too Much Too Soon?
The risks of overplay injuries in
young players



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Introduction

'Overplay' is a term used to describe the cause of injuries found in players and athletes due to excessive overuse of specific parts of their body.

Young players are particularly vulnerable to 'overuse' injuries caused by overplay.

The aim of this booklet is to alert those people who have direct contact with our best young players to the risks of overplay. They include:

- Parents
- Coaches
- School Teachers
- League Officials
- All other personnel involved in the development of young players

It is the responsibility of all who are involved in the development of young players to look after their medical interests.

WHAT IS AN OVERUSE INJURY?

An injury involving certain bones or muscles/tendons of the body, which develops over a period of time due to too much repetitive activity. The injury becomes worse with continued activity at the same level. It will continue unless correct medical advice and treatment is followed.

The nature of the problem



The increasing intensity of sport has led to the wider recognition of overuse injuries to children and adolescents.

Young players now indulge in football with ever-increasing intensity of training and competition at ever-decreasing ages.

It is a fact that, some players are asked to train more and play more matches than others.

If the player tries to please everybody the sum total of the player's efforts could lead to serious injury through overplay.

The risks of injuries caused by overuse are now known to be considerable. Injuries due to overuse will certainly hinder a young player's development. In some cases, injuries of this type have severely affected a young player's activities.

OVERUSE INJURY – A MEDICAL INSIGHT

The principles of adults train and play cannot be directly applied to young players, but must be adapted to their development.

It is during the early and adolescent years of life that the body's muscles and bones develop and grow. Growth spurts occur during this phase. The young player is vulnerable to injury during this period.

Injuries resulting from overplay usually affect the parts of the skeleton which constitute attachments of tendons, muscles and ligaments.

In children and adolescents who participate in regular training, the muscles can develop more rapidly than the skeleton which may be hazardous due to the unusual stress it puts on the skeleton. The growth areas of developing bones are also susceptible to stress from excessive activity. A further factor is that bone is thought to grow faster than soft tissues such as muscles and tendons, which become tighter with growth, particularly during growth spurts. This loss of flexibility increases the chance of injury. The fast growers are particularly at risk.

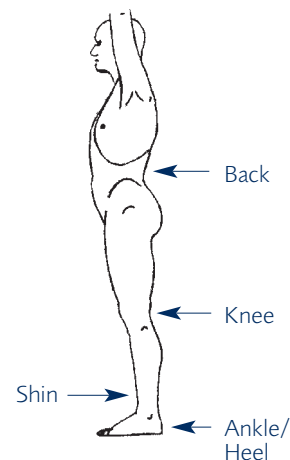
Football involves the strong actions of running, jumping and landing, which increase the chance of injury if excessive repetitive actions of this type are performed.

Recognising problems

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Overuse conditions caused by excessive participation can often be dismissed as growing pains without proper medical diagnoses being sought.

The four regions of the body that are particularly affected by overuse injuries in footballers are.



RECOGNITION OF OVERUSE INJURY – SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

The following serves to act as a guide. If several of the signs and symptoms are present, a medical opinion should be sought.

- ❑ Problem usually comes on gradually and continues whilst player continues to train and play
- ❑ Main symptoms are aching, discomfort or pain the area of the problem

- ❑ Pain where particular movement is performed
- ❑ No history of 'direct' injury
- ❑ Player may complain of stiffness/aching after or during training or competition
- ❑ Several hours/days for player to become 'pain free' following activity
- ❑ Player may demonstrate tenderness to touch or pressure over affected area
- ❑ Visible swelling may be present in the case of overuse injury affecting the knee or heel area
- ❑ Player shows history of missing training sessions or matches due to the injury
- ❑ The problem does not go away. It will get progressively worse with continued activity.

Conclusion



WHAT TO DO? – ACTION TO BE TAKEN IF YOU SUSPECT OVERUSE INJURY

Pain, swelling, tenderness and aching are nature's way of informing us that something is wrong with our body.

If some or all of the signs and symptoms outlined previously are present, then a medical opinion should be sought.

The player's family doctor should be consulted. He/she will then advise the player and his/her parents as to the course of action.

CONCLUSION

Keeping your eyes and ears open is an important factor in recognising an overplay injury. In many instances, potential problems can be minimised by early recognition and prompt action.

The Football Association's Medical Working Group advises all concerned to strongly consider the following:

- ❑ The amount of training and number of matches a young player is asked to be involved in
- ❑ That a player's activities should be partly aimed at success and partly at enjoyment
- ❑ Never dismiss signs and symptoms stated previously in this booklet.

The chances that an overuse injury could lead to further medical problems later are real.

All concerned must play their part in ensuring that our young players are protected.