Flag Football Injuries

The basic rules of flag football are like those of traditional 11-man tackle football, but instead of tackling players, flags are removed. Eliminating this player-to-player contact helps reduce the risk of injury. However, sprains, strains and tears can still occur.

What types of injuries are most common in flag football?

1. Ankle Sprain
In flag football, lateral ankle sprains often occur when you suddenly change direction, jump in an attempt to make a catch or get stepped on by another player’s foot. In some cases, you might hear or feel a pop. Mild sprains require rest, but injuries with persistent swelling, pain or any deformity should be seen by a physician.

2. Knee Injuries
An anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) sprain or tear often can happen in flag football when you change direction on the field or collide with another player. In some cases, you might hear a pop followed by swelling. If swelling or pain continues, you should be seen by a pediatric sports medicine physician.

3. Concussions
Football players are very susceptible to concussions. A concussion is a change in brain function due to a traumatic impact. Not all players who suffer a concussion will lose consciousness. The athlete should be removed immediately from play and return to play only when approved by a health care professional.

Signs of a concussion
- Headache
- Loss of balance
- Confusion/memory problems
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness/fatigue
- Blurry vision
- Nausea
- Numbness/tingling
- Light/noise sensitivity
4. Heat Injuries
Heat injuries, including dehydration, are a concern for youth flag football players. If you don’t get enough fluid to replace what is lost through sweating, painful cramping of major muscle groups can occur. It is important to drink plenty of fluids before, during and after practices or games. Seek emergency treatment if you feel disoriented, are unable to drink or have pale skin.

How can heat illness be prevented?
• Monitor hydration status by following urine output and urine color
• Take frequent and scheduled water breaks every 15 to 30 minutes
• Ensure water is readily available during games and practice
• Sports drinks help replace sugar and salt for activities lasting longer than an hour

5. Bumps, Bruises, Twists and Muscle Strains
When playing flag football, all types of bumps, bruises or strains can happen. Most of them can be treated with protection of the injury, rest, ice, compression and elevation (PRICE). Be sure to see a pediatric sports medicine professional if there’s deformity, limping that lasts more than 48 hours or if your swelling and pain worsens.

How can flag football injuries be prevented?
• Have a pre-season health and wellness evaluation
• Perform proper warm-up and cool-down routines
• Incorporate strength training and stretching
• Hydrate to maintain health and minimize cramps
• Stay active during summer break to prepare for fall sports
• Create a nutrition plan for before, during and after exercise
• Play by the rules of the game
• Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer about injury concerns or prevention strategies

Need immediate treatment for a flag football injury?
The Children’s Health Andrews Institute for Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine offers treatment for all sport-related injuries. Call to book your appointment today. With same-day and next-day appointments, we can get you in and back in the game.

Information created by and used with permission from STOP Sports Injuries. stopsportsinjuries.org