

Name of collection

What injuries are female athletes most likely to suffer from and how can they be prevented?

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Transcript:

Female athletes are actually much more susceptible to joint injuries than male athletes. They're about twice as likely to be injured at the ankle or the shoulder, but most significantly, there are about four and a half times more likely to suffer a non-contact ACL injury. That's an injury to the knee joint than their male counterparts. And this is so important for us to consider as coaches and athletes, because there are things that we can do to lower our injury risk.

So we really need to prioritise injury prevention as part of our training strategy. There's some really interesting emerging evidence about concussion of female athletes. So female athletes are actually more likely to suffer concussion and they have worse symptoms and a longer return to play than their male counterparts. And partly we think that's due to the fact that females have a smaller head and a weaker neck, so their neck muscles aren't as strong as males.

And what that means is the acceleration of the head is greater, and it's that acceleration during that whiplash type maneuver. That means that the brain suffers traumatic injury. Injury is really complex and injuries happen because a number of risk factors align in a given moment to cause an injury. But we know that one of those risk factors might be the hormones of the menstrual cycle.

The evidence at the moment is inconclusive, but there are suggestions that estrogen influences the laxity or the looseness of our joints. So estrogen interferes with the collagen of our joints. It makes our joints looser and as such, it means that they're less stable and so they might be more prone to injury. Now, we know across the cycle there are times when estrogen is higher than at other times.

So particular before ovulation. Just before halfway across the cycle. So we're waiting to see what the evidence shows in the future. But at the moment, we know that time of the cycle might be one of the risk factors involved in injury. We want to empower women to feel like they can exercise at any time with their menstrual cycle and be able to do exactly what they want to do.

And so we shouldn't take this link between estrogen and joint laxity and injury as a warning not to exercise at certain times of our cycle. But you might be someone who finds that they have a hamstring tightness or a back niggle that flares up at certain times of the menstrual cycle. That's why tracking your cycles is great. But if you are someone who finds that happening, then it's just really important to be aware of it and to find strategies to cope with it.

Maybe that's a different type of warm up, a more thorough warm up, maybe that's taping or some work with your physio.