

Fitness Talk with Cathy Sassin

Avoiding the Uh-Oh

Stay in the game with injury prevention

Tear! Rip! Pop! Crack! These sounds unfortunately don't always come from a Batman cartoon. Those of us who love to play outside with the same zeal that we have for great food and wine know too well that these gut-wrenching noises are usually followed by a scream, or at least a whimper.

Since injuries can literally stop you in your tracks, a little prevention goes a long way in keeping you active. Whether your injuries come from accidents or overuse, here are tips to help you avert the emergency room.

Although back injuries are the most common, knee and shoulder injuries take a strong second. But there are things you can do to avoid them. Dr. Cara Walther, a knee and shoulder specialist with Desert Orthopedics in Bend, is a cutting-edge professional who doesn't want you to wait to visit her office until you're injured.

Because knees are one of the most easily-injured body parts, Walther and her associates have designed a state-of-the-art ACL injury-prevention program called Kneebound. A tear to the ACL (a critical ligament that runs through the inside of your knee) is one of the most severe injuries in the orthopedic surgery category. Avoiding the injury, however, is a skill that can be learned, says Walther.

"The Kneebound program takes 20 minutes and teaches skills that don't require any equipment and little space, which means you can do them anywhere." Kneebound's guiding principles include: When cutting, jumping or landing, flex all three joints—hips, knees and ankles—to avoid the flat-footed landings that lead to the number-one ACL destroyer, hyperextension. The more joints you use, the lighter the load on each. Proper alignment is equally critical. Knock or wobbly-kneed? "You can teach your kneecap to track over the center of your foot," says Walther. Preventing injury is "not so much about the anatomy we inherit, but how we use it."

Athletes can also take measures to avoid overuse injuries. Using equipment that is not fit to your anatomy can take its toll on your joints and ligaments in the long run, the same way a car will wear through tires when it's out of alignment. I can't overemphasize the importance of getting fit to your equipment, particularly with repetitive activities like running and cycling. Footzone, Fleetfeet, Sunnyside Sports and Hutch's Bikes are good examples of shops in Central Oregon that have experts to outfit you properly.

Additionally, if you're competitive and expect to spend a lot of time at your given sport, you'll also want to have a professional evaluate your stride, pedal, swim or golf stroke. Rebound Sports Performance Lab, Bend Golf and Country Club, Bend Swim Club and Bend High School use a high-tech program called Dartfish to evaluate biomechanics and to optimize inherited anatomy.

What else can you do to stay in the game longer? Get with the new concepts for stretching. According to Craig Boswell of Therapeutic Associates, dynamic stretching (stretching through movement) should be done before your activity (warming up with standing squats and walking lunges) and static stretching (the traditional 30-second stretch and hold) should be done after.

If you're already nursing an injury, go to physical therapy! You will speed up your healing process through a variety of hands-on techniques, and also learn how to avoid the same injury in the future. When you do go to physical therapy, my best advice is to do exactly what your therapist tells you. It may require at-home icing and exercise routines that take 20 extra minutes from your day, but as Seth Ramsey from Rebound Physical Therapy reminds us, "The person who knows how to recover gets to keep playing."

If you want to play as hard as you can for as long as you can at Central Oregon's indulgent recreational opportunities, be sure to follow the advice of professionals—get personal with your equipment and your own unique inherited anatomy.