

# First Aid for Athletic Injuries

## Cuts, Scrapes and Bruises

Cuts, scrapes and bruises are everyday occurrences in many sports. Most are obviously minor and can be treated with simple first aid. The objectives in treating these minor injuries are to.

1. Stop the bleeding
2. Clean the wound thoroughly; and
3. Protect the wound.

## Stop the Bleeding

First, put on gloves!

Cuts and some scrapes may bleed freely. Cuts around the head are often prone to profuse bleeding. Also, athletes with an injured artery can lose a large amount of blood. Arterial bleeding can be recognized by the spurting or pumping of blood from the wound. The proper technique to stop bleeding is to apply **direct pressure** to the wound by firmly holding a clean dressing against it. If you are unable to stop the bleeding with direct pressure, seek medical assistance immediately.

To stop bleeding from a tongue that has been bitten, gently hold a clean dressing on the cut. Keep the athlete sitting up so that he or she doesn't choke on the blood or swallow excessive amounts.

## The Bloody Nose

A bloody nose often can be tough problem. The correct way to stop the bleeding is to have the athlete sit down and firmly pinch his or her nostrils shut for several minutes.

## Strains and Sprains

Athletic competition often results in injury to muscles, tendons or ligaments. A **strain** is an injury to a muscle or tendon; a **sprain** is an injury to a ligament. When athletes sprain an ankle, they have injured the ligaments. When athletes pull a hamstring they have strained the muscle or tendon.

The first goal of treating a strain or sprain is to limit the swelling in the hours following the

injury. The muscle or joint is not recovered until all the swelling is gone. If you can limit this swelling by proper first aid, the athlete will return to play more quickly. Proper first aid is the immediate application of **ice**.

To help you remember the proper sequence of first aid for athletic injuries, just remember the word ICE:

- ✓ Ice
- ✓ Compression
- ✓ Elevation
- ✓

## ICE

Ice is one of the most important parts of an athletic first aid kit. Regular cube ice or crushed ice can be placed in plastic bags and easily stored for ready use in a small cooler. (Commercially prepared ice packs are not as good as plain ice and are an unnecessary expense.) The bag of ice should be placed over a couple layers of an elastic bandage and wrapped over the injury.

## COMPRESSION

Compress the injured area by gently wrapping the ice bag in place with the remainder of the elastic bandage. The wrapping should be gentle and firm but not tight. If the elastic bandage is wrapped too tightly, you may cut off circulation to the underlying skin which, because of the ice, could produce frostbite.

## ELEVATION

Elevate the injury after the ice and elastic wrap have been applied. The injured limb should be propped up so that it rests higher than the heart. This allows any fluid that is collecting to drain away.

After providing first aid, have a doctor see the athlete to evaluate the injury. The sooner the athlete is seen, the better the doctor can examine the injury. If you wait until the following day, the injury may be so tender that the athlete cannot stand the pain of a careful examination.

Ice, compression and elevation also are good first aid for large bruises, especially on large muscles.

## **Heat Injury**

Heat injury is a life-threatening condition! If one of the athletes collapses after exertion in a hot environment, you must act quickly. Symptoms the athlete may exhibit prior to collapse are:

- ✓ Dry, hot skin with not sweating (not always)
- ✓ Confusion
- ✓ Dizziness
- ✓ Chills on the chest

If you see or an athlete describes any of these symptoms, you must cool him or her immediately.

### **If the athlete is conscious:**

1. Remove any head gear and other heavy clothing.
2. Douse with cold water, ice or ice towels.
3. Give cool liquids by mouth.
4. If improvement is not quick, GET HELP.

### **If the athlete is unconscious:**

1. Remove clothes.
2. Cool by packing body with ice, towels, or douse with cold water.
3. Do not give liquids by mouth.
4. Call an ambulance.
5. Give CPR if athlete stops breathing.

## **The Unconscious Player**

Being knocked unconscious is a serious injury and requires immediate medical assistance. First aid should be limited to making sure that the athlete is breathing and that his or her mouth and throat are clear of turf, blood or vomit. If the mouth and throat are not clear, clear them out with your

finger. Administer CPR if the athlete stops breathing.

Be careful about moving the athlete; besides having a concussion, he or she may also have a neck injury. When the athlete becomes conscious, keep him or her quiet and in place until seen by a doctor or paramedic.

## **Key points to Remember**

1. Have a “game plan” so you know who to call, how to call, and what to do in case of a serious injury.
2. Remember to bring ice to practice as well as games. 2/3 of injuries occur during practice.
3. The essentials of wound care are:
  - Stop the bleeding
  - Cleanse the wound
  - Protect the wound
4. Remember and practice the ABC's of ICE.
5. Know and practice CPR.