

## MOVING towards better health. By Karen Decker

### Don't get penalized with hockey injuries

The great Canadian sport of Hockey allows us to stay active in the winter months, and if played safely, even contribute to excellent physical condition. It allows us to develop muscle, speed, and agility and get a good cardiovascular workout. Whether playing on an organized team or pickup hockey with friends and co-workers, some common mistakes can increase the risk of injury. Below, are listed the 5 most common game day mistakes.

**1. Going out too hard.** It is important to get a good warm-up before starting to play. If time and space permit, a 5 minute warm-up off ice consisting of light *aerobic exercise* such as jogging around the rink or in place in the dressing room, or doing jumping jacks will increase blood flow to tissues making them more pliable and less likely to strain.

*Dynamic stretching* should then follow this. This type of stretching is simply the usual leg, torso and upper body stretches that have been competed by athletes for years, but we now suggest that prior to activity they are not held for sustained periods as previously instructed, but rather eased into and out of slowly. Muscles perform best when warm and able to contract rather than in an elongated position as occurs following sustained stretching.

Finally, complete your warm-up *on-ice* by skating around for 5 minutes. Another muscle positively affected by such an ease into warm-up is the heart. Numerous cases occur each year of heart attacks during friendly hockey games because comfort levels are exceeded too quickly.

**2. Not wearing proper equipment.** Hockey equipment is designed to reduce risk of injury – but only if it fits properly, is worn correctly and its quality is maintained throughout the season. One example of undue risk is wearing a helmet that does not fit, straps are worn too loose, or the *helmet* is expired! Yes helmets have a time stamped life span on them. Make sure the helmet has the CSA approved sticker as well.

Protect your neck by wearing a BNQ certified *neck guard*. A throat protector can help protect the player from a serious neck laceration. In order to be effective, the throat protector should be snug but not uncomfortably tight. It is important to ensure that it completely covers the throat; bib styles also cover the upper chest for better protection. This is cheap insurance to minimize risk.

Smile more. Every hockey player should have a *mouth guard* every time they hit the ice. Wearing it will help protect damage to the teeth, and potentially reduce impact causing concussions and jaw fractures. They also help prevent soft tissue injuries to the lips, cheeks and gums. There are a number of types of mouth guards that can be used depending on your budget. Even goaltenders should wear a mouth guard.

**3. Ignoring signs and symptoms of a concussion.** Hitting your head on the ice or even a whiplash effect from a hit can result in a concussion. One does not have to lose consciousness to have a concussion.

Subtle signs and symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, light headedness, nausea, ringing in the ears, irritability and difficulty remembering events should be respected as indicators that a brain injury has occurred. The player should discontinue playing and refrain from all other physical activity until they are assessed by a physician. Symptoms should be completely alleviated before returning to any sports.

**4. Not staying hydrated.** Dehydration can not only contribute to poor performance but also cause dizziness and potential fainting. Remember to bring your personal water bottle to the arena. Drink small sips throughout the game and re-hydrate after with 2 cups of water for every pound of body weight lost during the game. Pre-game hydration with 2-3 cups within 2 hours before game time is also a good idea. Water is still the best drink of choice but some sports drinks are also beneficial as long as they contain less than 10% sugar content.

**5. Not slowing down when hurt.** Playing through pain can delay healing and prolong injuries. A general sports medicine guideline to follow is that if pain and other symptoms such as swelling, weakness, and reduced range persist past 2 weeks, seek professional advice.

Avoid these mistakes and you will dramatically increase the chance of arriving home safely after the game and having a long season.

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