

PREVENTING SPORTS INJURIES AND EXPEDITING RETURN-TO-PLAY:

AN ATHLETIC TRAINER'S CHEATSHEET



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Regardless of whether it is minor, moderate or severe, an athletic injury is disruptive and will impact not just the physical health of an athlete but their emotional and psychological health as well.

In this guide, we'll discuss various strategies athletic trainers (ATs) can use to prevent acute and overuse sports injuries as well as reduce the chances of exacerbating these injuries.

YOUR ATHLETES RELY ON YOU TO HELP THEM REBOUND FROM AN INJURY, GET HEALTHY AND RETURN TO THE FIELD QUICKLY. [HERE'S HOW YOU CAN DO JUST THAT.](#)

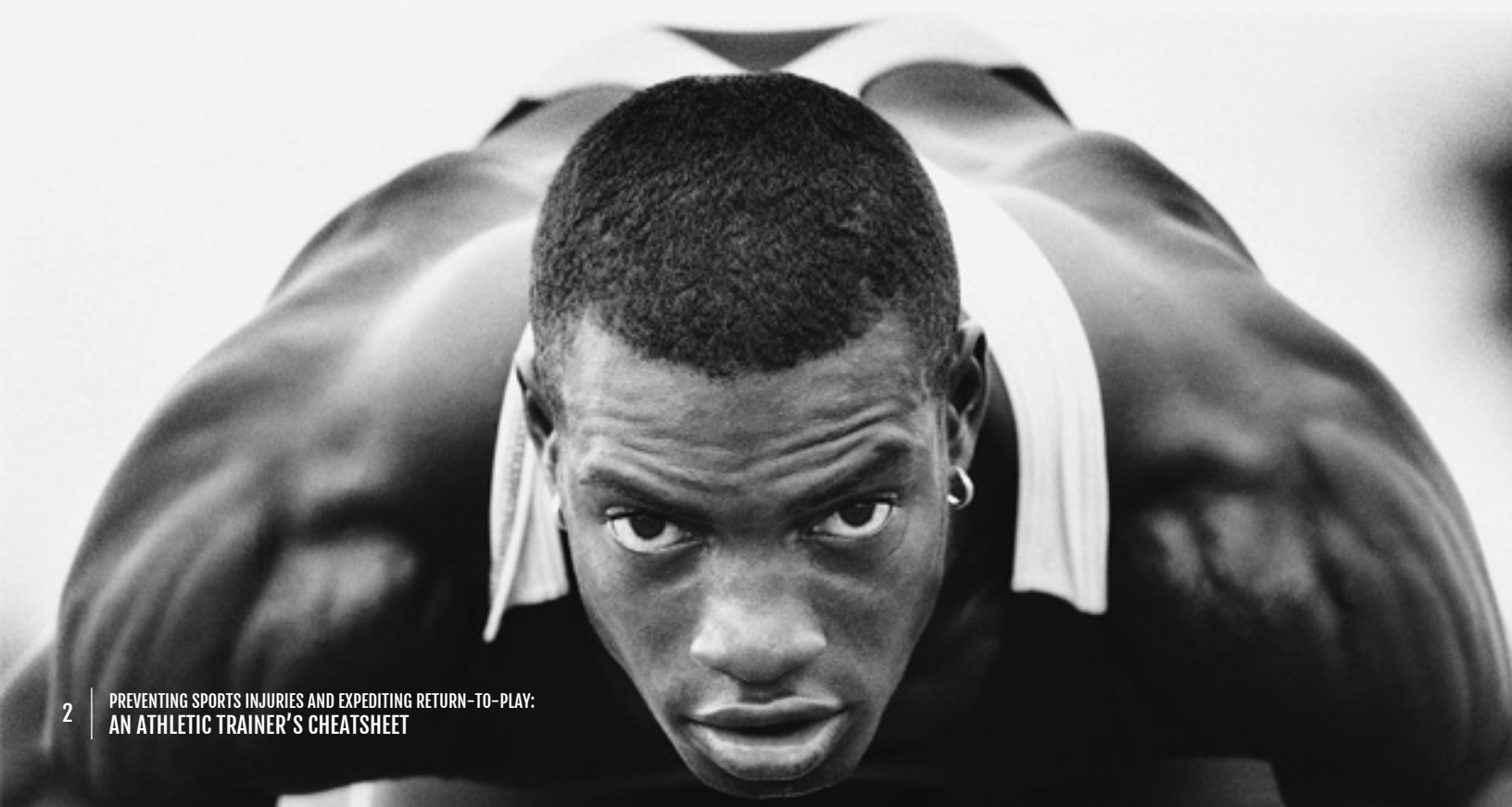


HOW ATs CAN

REDUCE THE RISK OF INJURY

While you can't prevent 100 percent of injuries, you can take some precautions to reduce the chances of an injury, such as...

- Employ cross-training with low-impact exercises such as cycling, weightlifting or swimming and use of equipment such as an elliptical machine or EFX trainer
- Ensure pre-season conditioning is specific to each discipline and also takes into account an athlete's individual weaknesses
- Implement a training program that allows muscle recovery time and time off between seasons
- Build an environment that encourages early reporting of injuries instead of minimizing injuries and exerting pressure to compete
- Teach all personnel and athletes how to recognize the signs of an overuse injury



HOW ATs CAN PREVENT EXACERBATION OF INJURIES

When one of your athletes gets injured, there are a few things you can do to help them recover as quickly as possible and make sure their injury isn't exacerbated.





HAVE AN EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN (EAP) IN PLACE

COMMUNICATION

- Identify all individuals who may assume a role on the emergency medical team as well as their level of training
- Have athletic trainers and emergency medical personnel meet before the event to discuss each person's duties
- Ensure all members of the emergency team have access to contact information for all other team members

EQUIPMENT

- Make sure all necessary emergency equipment and supplies are at the site of the athletic event and quickly accessible to all members of the emergency team
- Confirm each emergency care provider knows how to properly operate, care for and store all equipment
- Store equipment in a clean, climate-controlled area and regularly inspect it to confirm it is operating correctly

TRANSPORTATION

- Ensure every EAP has the individual site's address, different locations within the venue, phone numbers for people who should be contacted in the event of an emergency, designated ambulance entrance and fastest way to reach a nearby medical facility
- For especially high-risk activities, have an ambulance on-site
- Establish a specific parking area for the ambulance with easy access to athletes and an unobstructed route for exiting the venue

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

- Document all responses and actions taken during the emergency situation for an accurate record of the event
- Following the resolution of an emergency situation, have all emergency team members participate in a debriefing to evaluate how the situation was handled and identify areas for improvement
- Schedule annual reviews and rehearsals of the EAP

P.O.
P.E.

USE THE POPE PRINCIPLE

In his article, "The Problem of the Sports Doctor: Serving Two (Or Is It Three or Four?) Masters," Barry Furrow recommends a strategy sports medicine professionals can use to ensure the player's well-being is always the highest priority.

He uses the acronym **POPE** to summarize the approach:

P

Protect athletes from injury, re-injury or permanent disability, placing their welfare over that of the team or other competing interests

O

Offer candid and full disclosure as to the nature and extent of injuries and the consequences of returning to play

P

Practice good medicine, as defined by practice guidelines and consensus statement

E

Enable players to avoid unnecessary risks, both by helping them understand what proper treatment is and what risks are presented by returning to play, and by sharpening the framework for a declaration of ineligibility to play under some circumstances, removing the choice from the player as well as the team and coach

HOW THE TYPE OF INJURY AFFECTS TREATMENT AND RECOVERY TIME

Return time after an acute or overuse injury depends on...

- Severity of the injury
- Skills that need to be worked on
- Time of the year (related to the season in which a sport is played)
- Athlete's response to treatment


Total recovery time is minimized with...

- Early evaluation and treatment
- Early return to training with skill restrictions
 - Skill restriction involves scaling back the training program to accommodate the injured athlete
- Aggressive early rehabilitation and motion exercises

HELPING AN ATHLETE COPE WITH AN INJURY

When an athlete is injured, their physical pain is only a small part of the overall pain they must go through during the rehab process. The mental and emotional distress caused by an injury can often far outweigh the discomfort of a sprain or muscle strain. Here's how an athletic trainer can address and help improve all aspects of the athlete's health.





BE EMPATHETIC AND LET THEM KNOW IT'S OK TO FEEL SAD OR ANGRY.

Don't let them bury their feelings in an attempt to appear "tough." Dealing with the emotions is an important part of the healing process.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO FOCUS ON THE FUTURE, NOT THE PAST.

Don't let them think about what could have happened. Remind them that they can't go back in time and the only thing to do is move forward.

STRESS THE NEED TO MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Multiple clinical studies^{2,3,4} have shown being optimistic and keeping a positive attitude helps during injury recovery.

DON'T LET THEM ISOLATE THEMSELVES.

Make sure the athlete still attends practices and games. Remind the athlete that they're still an important part of the team and invite them to act as an assistant coach or consultant while they recover.

INVITE THEM TO TAKE AN ACTIVE PART IN THEIR HEALING WITH SHARED DECISION-MAKING.

In the shared decision-making process, your responsibility is to provide your knowledge and expertise, and the athlete's role is to communicate his or her needs and goals.

USE A COLD SPRAY TO HELP REDUCE THE DISCOMFORT ASSOCIATED WITH A TREATMENT.

Some athletes may resist coming to see you due to the fear of discomfort, which can inhibit your ability to administer proper treatment. Cold sprays can reduce this discomfort by temporarily numbing the athlete's injured area and giving you the opportunity to properly treat the minor injury, spasm, or strain.



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As an athletic trainer,

you do everything in your power to reduce the risk of injury—from pre-game stretches and conditioning to post-game physical therapy and rehabilitation. But even with required pre-participation physicals and emphasizing safe practice and training techniques, injuries are an unavoidable part of sports. However, if you use the strategies in this guide, you'll be better equipped to help your players prevent serious injuries and get them back on the field as quickly as possible.

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DON'T SWEAT IT, GET BACK IN THE GAME. TRY INSTANT ICE TODAY >

