



# Football

by Tom Austen, Podplus

## How football affects the foot

Footballers young and old can suffer many injuries. Some research has suggested that most injuries occur during the first and last period of games when players are either not warmed up properly or fatigued from their exertions. Most common injuries are shown to be around the ankle, knee, hamstring and groin.

The foot generally is enclosed in a tight fitting boot which is typically very flexible with a leather upper. This footwear does not tend to protect the foot very well but is ideal for traction on grass and allows for good contact with the ball.

The foot is involved in striking the ball - which, nowadays, is very lightweight - tackling opponents and, of course, your feet allow for movement around the pitch. Tackling can be a cause of impact or trauma injuries such as **fractures**. Twisting or turning can be causes of injuries such as **ankle sprains** or **knee ligament injuries**.

## Common problems and injuries that may occur

- **Fractures** can occur, typically of the second or fifth metatarsal. Generally this is due to either impact and trauma or twisting, which both place increased stress to the effected areas. Immediate assessment should be sought and treatment can either be rest, if the fracture is not displaced, or surgery, to reposition the broken bones.
- **Muscle strains**, most commonly with the hamstrings or calf muscles, generally due to the increased strain on the muscle due to the high intensity of stopping and starting in different directions.
- **Tendon problems**, typically with the Achilles tendon. Due to the multi-directional sprinting, the Achilles takes a lot of strain.
- **Ligament sprain**, typically either of the ankle or knee, occurs when the joint is moved further than it would normally. The ligament is then damaged and can result in the joint being more unstable.

Please turn over...



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## How podiatry can help

Normally if these problems are seen by a podiatrist and assessed, the podiatrist can create a treatment plan for you to get a good improvement. A podiatrist can help with superficial foot problems such as hard skin or callus, deal with in-growing toenails and verrucae.

A **biomechanical assessment** can look at your strength, flexibility and alignment as well as look at your **gait** (the way that you are walking/running) to assess if your lower limb and foot function is contributing to the cause of the injury.

If a soft tissue injury does occur, then it is normally sensible to follow the **RICE** acronym (see below) within the first 24 hours of the injury. This is used to reduce bleeding around the injury and prevent further damage occurring due to the swelling and compression of structures around the injury. Blood vessels and nerves can get damaged surrounding the injury if swelling and bleeding is allowed to occur, so by reducing this, it prevents the injury from being as bad as it could be.

- **Rest** – Rest the area to avoid any further injury.
- **Ice** – spend 10 - 15 mins each hour applying a cold pack against the affected area.
- **Compression** – Apply pressure to the affected area to reduce the swelling.
- **Elevation** – Raise the affected limb if possible.

## Tom's Top Tips

- Cut toenails straight across and file them to prevent any sharp edges.
- Get good fitting boots and ensure they are not too small. Get a boot that is not too flexible (doesn't bend in half!) and with a heel gradient is ideal.
- Warm up before playing with a five to 10 minute sport specific activity, progressing from a low and slow intensity up to a higher intensity. This would then normally be followed by some 'dynamic' stretches such as lunges and high kicks.
- Cool down and stretch afterwards with a three to five minute slow jog, or even walking with a long stride, followed by a traditional static stretching routine.
- Use a pair of flip flops in communal showers to prevent spreading of verrucae or athlete's foot infections.

## Tom Austen

Tom Austen owns Podplus Sports Shop & Injury Clinic in Ashford, Kent at the Julie Rose Athletics Stadium. Tom works regularly with Kent County Cricket Club and has worked with Gillingham Football Club. He has volunteered at the 2008 Commonwealth Games and numerous London Marathons. Tom's Podplus podiatry team provide all podiatry services at the Brighton Marathon. Tom is a clinical lecturer at the University of Brighton and also works alongside Dr Nick Webborn at the Sportswise clinic, Eastbourne.

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