



NORTHBRIDGE NETBALL CLUB

HOW TO STAY OUT OF THE EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT!

An article for Northbridge Netball Players, Coaches & Managers

By Dr Tam Pollock-Flinders, ER Doctor

I don't know about you, but when I mention that I play netball, most people look down at my legs. Whilst I might fancy that they are taking in my beautifully sculpted legs, their next comment usually gives the truth away; "knees are still holding up then?". Maybe my age is a contributor to that reaction, but in some ways, their instinct is not wrong. Netballers are prone to lower leg injuries. A Saturday afternoon shift, where I work, in a large Sydney Emergency Department, sadly, often tells the same story.

Lower limb injuries are the most common injuries sustained in netball. With ankle sprains, ACL tears and meniscal injuries being the most common. In children, upper limb fractures are also common, but this decreases with age. These lower limb injuries can result in profound consequences such as health care costs, time off work, physical disability, chronic pain, early retirement from the sport, etc, etc.

One study that I read quoted ankle sprains as being the most commonly reported injury in netball with approximately 4 in 5 participants sustaining a sprain, and half going on to sustain recurrent ankle sprains. These are sobering statistics indeed, and anecdotally would seem correct from my experience at work.

But we love netball! Should we be worried about the potential for these injuries. What can we do to improve these odds for ourselves? Do we just have to roll the dice each time we play and hope for the best? Fortunately, there are things we can do to reduce our risk.

We all have some risk factors for lower limb injuries. Some of these are modifiable, and some are not. My age, for instance, I cannot change. That is a non-modifiable risk factor. There are some things that we can do, however, to reduce the risk of us being injured. One of those things is an Injury Prevention Program (IPP). IPPs have been studied in other sports, and there is an increasing body of evidence to show that they reduce injuries. Some of ones that I looked at, that concentrated on knee control, core stability and balance, and landing techniques, reduced the risk of injury by half!



In 2013, New Zealand introduced their NetballSmart dynamic warm-up and education program. Two years later, Netball Australia introduced their KNEE program (Knee Injury Prevention for Netballers to Enhance Performance and Extend Play – hats off to whoever came up with the awesome acronym!). The KNEE program includes warm-up/footwork, strength, balance/landing and agility exercises specific to netball, and are divided into Junior, Recreational and Elite sections. It is very accessible at <https://knee.netball.com.au/>. These programs are developed to specifically benefit netballers.

The greatest challenge of IPPs is perhaps their poor utilisation. From by observation down at the courts, many junior teams use the warm-up exercises, but are less likely to go on to the other strengthening, balance/landing and agility exercises. Older teams may not even do that! If these can actually improve our chances of avoiding injury, then I think they are worth some effort.

Can I encourage you to consider introducing more of these exercises into your training, or even into your personal exercise routine. I have started doing some of them when I am out doing some exercise. If the evidence from other sports can be extrapolated, programs like these will help to keep us out of my Emergency Department on a Saturday afternoon!

If you are injured at netball seek appropriate medical advice.