

Playing it Safe this Spring

All across the country, spring sports are gearing up – or perhaps baseball and soccer seasons have already begun. Either way, along with spring sports comes the potential for injury if proper training is not part of the plan. Whether you are a professional athlete or have a little one who recently joined little league, improper – or lack of – training can lead to a plethora of injuries that can put a damper on the remainder of your sports season, or longer. Dr. Sujal Desai, a fellowship-trained orthopedic surgeon in the OSF Medical Group, offers tips for avoiding injury – and getting back on your feet if injury has occurred.

“The most common type of injuries that we typically see this time of year are strains and sprains of multiple joints. If it is a sport that involves running, jumping, kicking – we see a lot of knee injuries. If it’s a racquet sport or anything that involves throwing – we see a lot of shoulder and elbow injuries. But basically your garden variety sprains and strains are typically what we see,” says Dr. Desai.

Dr. Desai says that this spring in particular is bringing with it more sports-related injuries than usual.

“This spring is a little different because of the pandemic. Kids and adults alike have been deconditioned. And when you go back to sports and activity, sometimes you are more prone to injury if you go back too soon and are not conditioned. Typically what we will see are basic sprains and strains – however, what’s more on the helm is ligament injuries and tears,” Dr. Desai adds.

In order to avoid these types of injuries, it is important to develop a training and conditioning routine no matter your age or athletic ability.

“Before diving right in, have a good program to condition yourself. Stretch out before and after practice. Hydrate well. I would also work on strengthening of the joints and ligaments and muscles that are involved with the sport that you are participating in,” explains Dr. Desai.

Most importantly, Dr. Desai urges individuals who do experience a sports-related injury this spring to put a pause on your training and sit out the next game until you are able to rest it properly.

“Don’t push through any kind of pain. We see a lot of injuries happen when people try to push through painful conditions in their joints, muscles, tendons – and it can worsen something. Where if you catch it early, it may just require basic resting, ice, elevation, anti-inflammatories and basic supportive care,” Dr. Desai advises.

After the immediate rest time following an injury to a ligament, tendon or joint – it is important to reevaluate the injury to determine if more thorough treatment is needed. If the pain lasts longer than a couple days, it may be time to get an evaluation.

“If someone did get injured, typically I say monitor it for about 24 to 48 hours. If pain, swelling, inflammation doesn’t go away with your typical rest, ice, elevation, and use of anti-inflammatories – then I would say after 48 hours it’s a good idea to talk to your doctor, whether it be a family practitioner or an orthopedic surgeon,” says Dr. Desai.

Whether you are starting a new sport or you are a seasoned athlete getting back in the game, Dr. Desai urges all athlete to have fun this spring while keeping these safety measures in mind.

If you do experience an injury that does not heal on its own with proper rest, go to www.osfhealthcare.org to find a list of primary care and orthopedic providers near you for further evaluation.