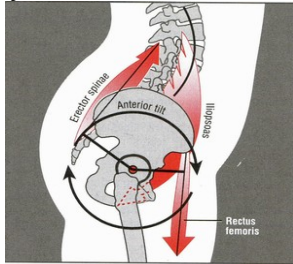


Basketball Injuries 101: What are they and how do you prevent them?

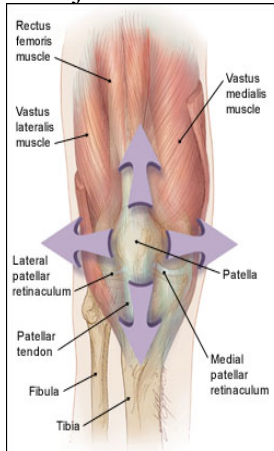
As a former competitive basketball player myself, I am well aware of all the injuries, aches, and pains that are common to the sport. Playing a sport that requires explosive movement, the ability to cut on a dime, and repetitive jumping serves to create problems that might lead to injury. The key here is the word LEAD to an injury. Many basketball-related aches and pains are more often related to repetitive stress on joints as apposed to a single traumatic event such as an ankle sprain.

If you're anything like I was, you play a lot of basketball. In my last year of high school I was on 3 separate teams playing at least 5 days a week. I would suffer chronic low back pain that I thought was due to my spine. I saw chiropractors and physiotherapists who provided symptomatic care that would allow me to play in the next game, but the problem always seemed to come back too soon. In my case, my "back" problem had nothing to do with my spine at all. My glut muscles were severely under active and my hip flexors were chronically tight. This creates what is known as lower crossed syndrome.



Tight muscles at the front of your hips and in your back cause your pelvis to shift forward. This increases the curve of your low back leading to chronic low back pain from tight muscles, irritated nerves, or compressed discs. Treating just the back will do little to help his problem heal.

Another common issue seen with basketball players is pain at the front or sides of the knee. People in the rehab world often refer to this as "Patellofemoral Pain Syndrome" (PFPS). Often this nagging and sometimes debilitating pain has less to do with the actual knee joint itself and more to do with the muscles that support it.



The patella, or kneecap should normally sit within the groove made for it by the femur. This happens when all the muscles that attach to it are working well to keep it in place. Often, the inner quad muscle (VMO) is weak and the outer quad muscle and tendon are too tight. This places a lateral pull on the kneecap causing it to rub against the outer portion of the femur leading to pain.
Another reason for this condition is weak gluts. Just like with low back pain, if the gluts are weak other muscles are going to become overused to compensate. If a muscle called the tensor fascia latte (TFL) is overused because the gluts are weak, it will increase the lateral pull on the patella via the Iliotibial band leading to knee pain.

Both of these problems have one thing in common; they both are a result of imbalances within the body. Treating the back or knee locally with manual therapy, ice, or modalities might help the pain temporarily but I assure you the pain will come back again and again until the root cause is found and treated.

I know not all issues related to basketball are overuse related. Some happen as a result of the speed and physicality of the game itself. No sport produces more ankle injuries than basketball. You can wear high-tops and tape, but in the end that's just tape and fabric. If you're going to sprain your ankle, you're going to sprain your ankle. Athletes who suffer recurring sprains don't necessarily have weak ankles—they may be very strong—but they lack balance because the proprioceptors have been damaged from previous ankle injuries.



Even athletes with the best trainers in the world sprain their ankles. Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers has been known to sprain his ankle 2-3 times a season! Once you get your first sprain, at any age, proper rehab is essential to preventing future sprains!



There are different grades of sprains, each requiring slightly different rehab guidelines. However, any ankle sprain rehab protocol must include balance and proprioception training. Believe it or not, the ligaments in the ankle have tiny mechanoreceptors in them, which are responsible for telling the brain where your ankle is in space. When these get injured, they lose that ability to tell your brain to keep the ankle in neutral. This is why it is paramount that after the initial rest, ice, compression and elevation (R.I.C.E) stage of healing is over, balance training be started at once.

If you suffer from pain related to basketball, either from a traumatic injury or a nagging condition, you owe it to yourself to get examined by a rehab specialist. The therapists at Honsberger Physiotherapy are uniquely trained to search for the root cause of the problem. We do so by utilizing a biomechanical approach that encompasses a total-body examination and systematic treatment plan tailored to your unique condition. We want to get you better faster with less reliance on passive therapy and more reliance on active care. That is our goal for you.

Jesse Awenus is a registered physiotherapist at Honsberger Physiotherapy and Biomechanics Clinic in Markham. He has played competitive basketball, representing Canada at the 2005 Pan-American Maccabi Games in Santiago, Chile. He has experience treating basketball-related injuries from the viewpoint of both a player and therapist. He knows the demands of the game and what players need to perform at their best. (jawenus@honsbergerphysio.com)

