



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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## Resource Document Sports and Recreation Safety *Touch Football*

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### Narrative:

Sports activities, including touch football, injured more Soldiers in fiscal 2011 than any other off-duty activity. Because of the serious risk of personal injury that can render a Soldier non-deployable or require medical evacuation from a deployment, leaders must consider the risk when starting a “friendly” game of touch football.

Touch football and other leisure sports-related injuries are commonly caused by overuse, direct impact, or the application of force that is greater than the body part can structurally withstand. An injury that happens suddenly, such as a sprained ankle caused by an awkward footfall, is known as an acute injury. Remember: what seems like an ankle sprain may actually be a bone fracture.

Preparation for touch football, like any sport, requires proper warm-up to reduce the risk of bodily injury. The same applies to the rules for playing touch football. Understand the game and ensure all other players also understand them. Prepare for the weather, playing conditions and the skill level of all players.

It is imperative that leaders engage their Soldiers on these risks and involve themselves so that ‘friendly’ doesn’t turn ‘ugly.’

### Key Messages:

- Encourage Soldiers to provide leadership in off-duty sports to prevent injury and ‘follow the rules’ to minimize the potential for injury.

- Sports injuries can be reduced with proper warm-up, leadership and following the rules of the game.

### **Talking points:**

- Sports activities in 2011 injured more Soldiers than any other off-duty activity.
- Leadership during a game is like having a battle buddy. Ensure that other players 'follow the rules' in order to minimize injuries caused by rough play. Never allow injured players to continue 'playing hurt.' Injuries should be tended to promptly to ensure they don't become worse.

### **Tips:**

According to the Better Health Channel, the knee and ankle are the most commonly injured sites in touch football injuries. Others include lower leg - injuries include sprains, strains, dislocations and fractures of the knee and ankle. Hand - such as sprains, strains, dislocations and fractures of the fingers. Hamstring - soft tissue injury to the muscle at the back of the thigh. Head - injuries include black eye, split lip and concussion. Impact injuries - from falling over or colliding with another player. For example, the shoulder can be injured from a heavy fall. Common touch football injuries include sprains, strains, dislocations, fractures and concussion. Certain maneuvers increase the risk of injury, such as diving for the ball, changing direction and touching.

Here are a few tips that may help prevent injuries while participating in sports:

- Exercise regularly to keep fit.
- Wear shoes appropriate to your sport. Ideally, your shoes should have ribbed soles or moulded cleats.
- Apply SPF 30+ sunscreen to all areas of exposed skin. Reapply regularly.
- Warm up thoroughly before playing. Include plenty of sustained stretches. Cool down after activity.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after the game.
- Get involved with a sports club, to enable you to learn the skills and technique associated with touch football.
- Seek prompt medical treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from sports activities.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) with rest, ice, compression, elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and seek advice from a health professional.
- Do not resume play until you have fully recovered from injury.
- Players with a history of joint injury (for example: ankle) should seek medical advice about taping or bracing the affected area or joint before playing.
- If on a sports team, ask your coach for tips on how to improve your technique and reduce the risk of injury.

### **Historical Reference:**

<https://safety.army.mil/>

<http://www.usaflagfootball.com/>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20117588>

<http://www.footballbabble.com/football/flag/injuries/>

**Statistics:**

- A 10-year Air Force study of touch football injuries found that 42 percent of injuries came from contact with another player.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 50 percent of sports accidents involving children, including touch football, are preventable.
- Snowboarding/skiing led off-duty injuries with 12, touch football was second with seven injuries and basketball was third with five injuries.

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