

## HOOPS HEALTH

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Basketball is one of the most popular recreational sports in the armed forces. It's an excellent tool for fitness and fun that can break up the monotony of a physical training program. Probably due to its popularity, basketball is also a leading cause of sports-related injuries among service members.

According to the U.S. Army Public Health Command, Army survey data show that each year Soldiers suffer more than 50,000 sports injuries requiring medical care. Basketball is consistently a leading injury-producing sport for Soldiers both deployed and at home station. Although they can suffer a variety of injuries playing basketball, the lower extremities — specifically the knee and ankle — are the most commonly affected areas.

One of the more serious, yet common, injuries from basketball is a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). The ACL is a vital ligament that helps keep the knee stable when a person bends at the knee, squats and jumps. The ACL can be torn or sprained when the player twists, jumps, lands, pivots or suddenly stops. Females have a much greater risk of tearing an ACL.

Another very common site of injury is the ankle. Ankle ligament sprains and tears usually occur when the foot is "rolled" or twisted inward after an awkward landing, pivot or cut. It's usually the outer ligaments of the ankle that get injured. Both ACL and ankle ligament tears can result in surgery and rehabilitation that can last six months to a year. Recreational athletes will benefit from practicing some simple techniques that may prevent a good time on the court from becoming a major injury.

### Warm-up

The warm-up cannot be overemphasized for any sport and becomes more important if one rarely plays basketball. The warm-up involves practicing the specific movements required in basketball — but at a much slower and controlled pace. Take 10 to 15 minutes to practice techniques such as jumping, landing, cutting, pivoting and handling the ball. These activities prime the muscles and nervous system to keep movements precise and controlled, which will protect ligaments, tendons and joints. Stretching is not the same as a warm-up, but it can be a part of the warm-up.

### Know Your Limits

Don't try and play above your skill level. Overconfidence in one's athletic abilities has been the downfall of many recreational basketball players. Don't get sloppy with technique or overexuberant with movements that you may not be accustomed to doing. The "I-used-to-be-able-to-dunk" syndrome is one example. Also, be aware of the skill level of your opponent, who may be much better (or worse) than you.

### Wear Ankle Braces

Those with prior ankle sprains are especially vulnerable to a re-injury and should consider wearing an ankle brace while playing basketball. It is unknown how much preventive value an ankle brace provides an athlete that has never sprained their ankle. However, it may be beneficial for those who are inexperienced or underconfident in their basketball movement skills. A high-quality ankle brace can usually be attained from sick-call or a medical treatment facility physical therapy clinic at no charge. Unfortunately, knee braces do not have much preventive value for basketball-related knee injuries.

### Conclusion

In addition to its physical fitness benefits, basketball can be a source of stress relief for many Soldiers. But it can also lead to injuries that result in significant lost duty time and a decrease in readiness. Before participating in a pick-up game of basketball, or any other sport, make sure you're properly prepared so your hoop dreams don't turn into a nightmare.

### FYI

Basketball injuries aren't limited to the knee and ankle. To better protect yourself on the court, consider the following:

- Wear appropriate basketball shoes.
- Remove rings and jewelry.



- Ensure the playing surface is clean and in good condition.
- Check the court and sidelines for tripping hazards such as gym bags and water bottles.
- Ensure the goal posts are padded and offset.
- Use mouth guards and eye protection (ASTM F803 standard).