

## Football Safety

Because of its violent nature and the sheer numbers of people who play, football is the leading cause of school sports injuries. Aside from minor aches and pains, common football injuries include ankle sprains, pulled muscles, broken bones, torn ligaments, and concussions.

Fortunately, many football injuries can be prevented by wearing the right equipment, playing within the rules, and using proper technique.

## Gear Guidelines

You'll need a lot of protective gear to play football, and you'll need to remember to wear all of it each time you play. If you show up for a practice or game without a necessary piece of equipment, tell your coach, and don't try to play until you fix the situation.

At a minimum, you should never take the field without the following gear:

**Helmet.** All football helmets should have a hard plastic outer shell and a thick layer of padding. Helmets should meet the safety standards developed by the National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (NOCSAE). Ask for help from your coach or a trained professional at a sporting goods store to make sure you get a helmet that meets these standards and fits well.

Helmets also should have a rigid facemask made from coated carbon steel. Check your facemask to make sure it is properly secured to the helmet. There are different face masks for different positions and purposes. Ask your coach which one would be appropriate for you.

Finally, all helmets should have a chin strap with a protective chin cup. Always keep your chin strap fastened and snug whenever you play.

**Pants with leg pads.** Some football pants include pads that snap into place or fit into pockets within the pants. Other pants are shells that you pull over your pads. Regardless of which style you choose, you should have pads for your hips, thighs, knees, and tailbone.

**Shoulder pads.** Football shoulder pads should have a hard plastic shell with thick padding.

**Shoes.** Different leagues have different rules dictating the type of shoes and cleats (non-detachable or detachable) you can use. Check with your coach and consult your league's guidelines regarding which types of shoes are allowed.

**Mouthguard.** All football leagues will require you to use a mouthguard. Be sure to get one with a keeper strap that attaches it securely to your facemask.

**Athletic supporter with cup.** Worn properly, this essential piece of equipment helps male athletes avoid [testicular injuries](#).

**Additional gear.** Other items that you might want to consider using for protection include:

- padded neck rolls
- forearm pads
- padded or non-padded gloves
- "flak jackets" that protect the ribcage and abdomen

If you need to wear glasses on the field, be sure they're made of shatterproof glass or plastic.

## **During Games and Practices**

Know and obey the rules of football. There's a reason why things like tripping, clipping, grabbing the facemask, blocking below the knees, and helmet-to-helmet contact are illegal. They can be dangerous to both you and others. The point of the game is to hit opposing players, but if you don't do it in a legal manner, you will cost your team on the field and greatly increase your risk of injury.

When making a tackle, keep your head up and never lead with the top of your helmet. Known as "spearing," this is not only illegal, it also greatly increases your chances of a traumatic head or neck injury. Practice tackling with correct form until you are sure you can do it safely in a game.

Know your vulnerabilities. If you will be playing an offensive "skill position" such as wide receiver, running back, or quarterback, you'll find yourself in a vulnerable position as defenders try to tackle you. Learn how to absorb contact and protect yourself when you have the ball or are making a throw or catch.

Be aware of where you are on the field and what is going on around you at all times. Football can seem a little chaotic, but if you pay attention to what you're doing, you can usually avoid accidental collisions that might otherwise lead to injuries.

If you have any pain or discomfort, take yourself out of the game. Never try to play through pain. It only increases the severity of an injury and keeps you out of action longer. Don't start playing again until the pain goes away or you get cleared to play by a doctor.

If you feel like an opposing player is deliberately trying to injure you, don't start a fight or try to retaliate. Let your coach and the referee know, and let them handle the situation.

Stop at the whistle. Give it your all when a play is in progress, but be sure to stop as soon as you hear the whistle. It's not uncommon for a player to get hurt when one player keeps going after everyone else relaxes at the whistle

## **A Few Other Reminders**

Make sure there is first aid available at the fields where you play and practice, as well as someone who knows how to administer it. This can be a coach or other responsible adult. Have a plan for emergency situations, and be sure there is someone available to take injured players to the emergency room or contact medical personnel to quickly treat serious injuries.

When you are on the sidelines waiting to go into a game, stand well back from the playing field so you don't find yourself in the way if a play spills out of bounds.

Study the playbook and know what you are supposed to be doing on every play. Then practice, practice, practice until you have your responsibilities down pat. The more confident you are in what you're doing on the field, the less likely you are to get hurt.

Lastly, don't forget to have fun out there. Football can be a very demanding sport, and between all the repetition of practice and the hype and glitz of college and pro football, it can be easy to forget what attracted you to the game in the first place.

Football is tons of fun to play. Wear the right gear and use a little common sense, and you can help keep yourself injury free and out on the field having a great time.