

Winter Court Sports Can Present Problems for Feet, Ankles Part 2

Last week we talked about some common court-sport type of injuries that you need to be aware of, along with tips to consider. This week part two of that topic.

Another common injury site in court-sports is the heel. Heel pain can indicate a plantar fascia injury or bone spur. The plantar fascia is a thin, very strong tissue band that supports the arch of the foot, stretching from the heel to the ball of the foot. As the arch falls, the band of tissue is under increasing tension and the weakest link is where the tissue attaches to the bottom of the heel. Over time and with repeated shocks, micro-events can occur and cause the fascia to tear from the heel, resulting in bone spurs and whole lot of hurt!

Ninety-nine percent of the time, conservative care is effective in relieving painful heels. For the few who don't respond, physical therapy or surgery should be considered.

In addition to heel injuries, podiatric foot and ankle surgeons frequently see injuries to the Achilles tendon and other tendons about the ankle that often could be prevented. Despite the fact that most understand the importance of stretching, it is very rare that someone will do appropriate stretching for their Achilles and calf muscle units before activity.

Stretching before activity can go a long way toward prevention. A ruptured Achilles tendon requires surgery and is very common in baby boomers who aren't flexible and don't warm-up." Achilles and calf stretches as crucial prior to competing in court sports.

For a gentle stretching of the lower extremities and the Achilles tendon, lean against a table or wall, placing one foot behind the other. Point the toes slightly inward and roll the ankle toward the outside. Gently lean forward and feel the stretch high up into the calf muscle. Always roll the weight to the outside border of the foot and never stretch to the point of producing pain.

Here are some more tips to consider:

- Buy new, quality athletic shoes and replace them frequently. Ask your foot doctor about what kind of shoe and insert is best for your foot.
 - Have the proper footgear for the sport; running shoes are not proper for sports such as basketball due to their lack of lateral support.
 - Seek appropriate support for arches; flat and high arches call for after-market or custom-made arch supports in shoes.
 - In children, be aware of the potential for injuries of the growth plate in the heel. Persistent heel pain is more than simple overuse; kids should stop participation immediately and a diagnosis should be sought.