

## THINKFIRST CANADA'S FOOTBALL INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

As a contact sport football carries with it a measure of risk, but fortunately the majority of injuries are non-catastrophic. ThinkFirst Canada's top tips to reduce your chances of sustaining an injury while playing football are below. This information is taken from Chapter 36 "Football" in the ThinkFirst book entitled *Catastrophic Injuries in Sports and Recreation: Causes and Prevention – A Canadian Study* edited by Charles H. Tator and published by the University of Toronto Press in 2008.



### TOP TIPS:

- All players should have access to adequate pre-seasonal, seasonal, and on-field medical expertise.
- Players should be matched to size, strength, power, skill level, fitness and experience.
- Players should undergo a proper conditioning regimen which includes strengthening neck muscles.
- Implement a year round conditioning and training program to maintain muscle strength, balance, coordination, flexibility, mobility, agility, and endurance.
- Players should be taught the essential skills of football, especially tackling and blocking.
- Discourage all foul play and strictly enforce rules.
- Limit contact during practice, instead use equipment to teach strategies.
- Properly fit players with protective equipment: helmet, shoulder and neck padding, and a mouthguard. Teach them to appropriately pad and tape themselves.
- Players and coaches should understand the basics of injury mechanisms, how to identify a serious injury, and when to seek help.
- Never allow a player to return to a game or practice session if that player has sustained a concussion or other brain injury.
- The field should be well maintained and an adequate buffer zone should be in place surrounding the playing area to prevent out-of-bounds injuries.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- In the ThinkFirst-Tator study (2008), there were 30 catastrophic injuries in tackle football in Ontario. All the catastrophic injuries were sustained between the ages of 11-30.
- Fortunately, the majority of injuries in football are non-catastrophic. The most common injuries are: contusions, muscle strains, and ligament sprains.
- In the U.S. it is estimated that football accounts for 63% of all concussions sustained in high school sports.
- Head injury is the most common injury responsible for death in tackle football, followed by cervical spine injury. Head injury makes up 69% of all on-field deaths.
- Of the non fatal catastrophic injuries, cervical spine injuries are the most common in tackle football.
- The most common cause of spinal cord injury is from axial loading to the spine when players spear each other head first during a tackle.

### **Risk Factors to Consider**

**Age and gender:** of the 30 catastrophic injuries 29 were sustained by males all under the age of 30.

**Previous Injuries:** having a previous injury predisposes a player to re-injury.

**Style of play:** aggression, inattentiveness, and rule breaking lead to increased risk of injury.

**Position:** Defensive backs are at greatest risk for brain and spinal injury. Receivers, running backs, and quarterbacks are also at increased risk.

**Field surface:** it is generally believed that natural grass is safer than artificial turf.

**Equipment:** properly fitted helmets and neck support reduce risk for injury.

*Remember: [thinkfirst.ca](http://thinkfirst.ca) before you play!*