

Sporting Injuries

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There have been dramatic improvements in our understanding of sports injuries over the past two decades. This has been largely driven by the demands of professional sport, but the benefits have flowed through to the general population.

The pattern of sporting injuries has also changed considerably with an increasing percentage of overuse injuries such as tendinopathies and stress fractures compared to acute injuries such as fractures, ligament sprains and muscle strains. With the development of sports medicine as a profession, research in the area of sports medicine has grown exponentially in keeping with the push towards evidence-based medicine.

Twenty years ago the solution to most sporting injuries was seen as a lengthy period of rest and immobilisation of the injured part. Nowadays rest is regarded as a four letter word, and recognition of the deleterious effects of immobilisation has led to the push towards early protected mobilisation and aggressive rehabilitation widely used in the management of musculoskeletal injuries and known as “the sports medicine approach”.

The torn ACL is a good example of the changes in sports medicine. Instead of a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament of the knee being a career-ending injury it is now no more than a minor blip in the career of a netballer, footballer or skier. This is due to a combination of reasons including an improved understanding of the role of the ACL, a better understanding of the clinical presentation, the ability to image the torn ACL, the preference towards arthroscopic reconstruction therefore avoiding the need for an arthrotomy with its subsequent morbidity, early post-operative mobilisation, and an accelerated rehabilitation program with an emphasis on muscle co-ordination and proprioception rather than just simply restoring muscle strength. The next step is to try and prevent these injuries, and already there is some evidence that training programs aimed at improving proprioception and landing techniques may significantly reduce its incidence.

We are fortunate in this country in having developed a medical specialty in sports medicine that is the envy of the rest of the world, and in having paramedical and sports science input of a quality unmatched elsewhere.