

SAFE SPORTS REPORT 2006

REPORT SUMMARY

- Independent research commissioned by Medibank Private reveals Australia's most injury-prone sports and the physical, economic and emotional 'costs' of being hurt during training or competition.
- 5.2 million Australians suffer sports-related injuries each year.
- Sports injuries cost the Australian community approximately \$2 billion last year.
- Despite an increase in preventative measures, three in five survey participants attributed their injury to an accident or 'just bad luck'.
- For Australians who risk not having private health cover, an accident can mean large medical bills, long waiting periods and additional stress on top of the injury set-back.

WHAT'S THE MEDIBANK PRIVATE SAFE SPORTS REPORT ABOUT?

Australia is a sports-loving nation, as both participants and spectators.

At Medibank Private our focus and membership base are not elite athletes, but normal Australians who love the outdoors, being active and exercise for physical wellbeing and social enjoyment.

When Medibank Private launched its *Sports Injuries Report* in 2003, we wanted to provide statistics about the incidence of sports-related injuries and offer precautionary advice. We have since broadened the scope of the report to highlight the physical, economic and emotional 'costs' of injury, including treatment, rehabilitation, recovery time and absence from work, physical and social activity.

In the *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* we've also explored: Australians' most popular forms of exercise; the top 10 most injury-prone sports; peak injury risk periods; and comparison of physical activity levels amongst the States and Territories.

The report combines independent research into Medibank's customer base by leading market research firm, AMR Interactive, with academic modelling and commentary by one of Australia's foremost sports physicians, Dr Peter Larkins.

The intention of this publication is not to scare people off exercise – to the contrary, Medibank Private wants to encourage members to reap the health and wellbeing benefits of keeping active and fit.

However, we also want to reinforce the importance of injury prevention techniques and private health insurance cover whether you're part of a team, exercise alone, or have a social 'hit' or 'kick' with mates.

As you will read in further sections of this publication, accidents can still occur even when you take precautionary measures. For Australians who don't have private health cover, this can mean long waiting periods or large medical bills costing thousands of dollars and additional stress.

George Savvides
Managing Director
Medibank Private

TOP 20 MOST POPULAR SPORTS AND ACTIVITIES¹

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Walking | 11. Netball |
| 2. Aerobics/fitness | 12. Basketball |
| 3. Swimming | 13. Australian Rules football |
| 4. Golf | 14. Yoga |
| 5. Tennis | 15. Surf sports |
| 6. Running | 16. Lawn bowls |
| 7. Soccer | 17. Dancing |
| 8. Fishing | 18. Touch football |
| 9. Cricket | 19. Squash/racquetball |
| 10. Bush walking | 20. Martial arts |

HOW OUR STATES AND TERRITORIES COMPARE

According to recent findings by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), our fittest State (per capita) is the ACT, of which 76.1% of its residents are physically active. Western Australia comes a close second (with 74.9%) and South Australia takes out the 'wooden spoon' – being the least active State with 57.7% of residents participating in sport.

SPORTS PARTICIPATION PER CAPITA²

ACT – 76.1%
WA – 74.9%
NT – 70.6%
VIC – 63.0%
QLD – 61.2%
TAS – 60.3%
NSW – 59.5%
SA – 57.7%

In terms of average body mass, the *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* found Tasmania tipped the scales as the heaviest State (with an average body mass index of 27.20 per person), followed by New South Wales and the ACT (25.88). Western Australians were shown to be the lightest, with an average body mass index of 24.91 per person.

AVERAGE ADULT BODY MASS INDEX³

TAS – 27.20
NSW/ACT – 25.88
QLD – 25.55
SA/NT – 25.37
VIC – 25.20
WA – 24.91

South Australians and Northern Territorians recorded the highest injury rates, with one in three sports participants surveyed sustaining an injury.

HOW WE EXERCISE

The *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* found that our members' main motivations to exercise were (in order): general health and fitness; to lose weight/get in shape; to have fun and enjoy social benefits; and to generally feel better (i.e. mental and emotional benefits).

It revealed that 'individual' rather than 'team-based' activities were the most popular. Walking, aerobics/fitness, swimming and golf ranked amongst the top five participation sports for Medibank Private members, which is consistent with results of surveys conducted with the broader Australian population.

Some of the reasons for the high uptake of walking as a means of exercise are: it's low or no cost; it can be more easily incorporated in to people's schedules; it's suitable for all fitness levels; and it promotes mental and physical wellbeing.

While walking is generally considered a 'gentle' physical activity, it's important that people don't underestimate the need for injury prevention and personal safety practices. As well as wearing suitable well-fitted shoes, walkers should wear appropriate clothes for the conditions and to be highly visible to car drivers. They need to keep hydrated and be mindful of their posture. Warming up and cooling down for approximately five to 10 minutes is also an important aspect of walking routines.

Almost two-thirds of Medibank Private members have participated in sports consistently for at least five years, and most exercise at least once a week.

On average, Medibank Private members are more active than the general population, with 79% participating in sports during the past 12 months compared with 62.4% of the general population.⁴

¹ ABS data (Year Book 2005).

² West Australian Sports Injuries Study (WASIS), 2001.

³ Medibank Private members' survey results, 2005.

⁴ Medibank Private members' survey results combined with ABS data (Year Book 2005).



TOP 10 MOST INJURY-PRONE SPORTS⁵

1. Australian Rules Football
2. Basketball
3. Netball
4. Running
5. Tennis
6. Cricket
7. Soccer
8. Aerobics
9. Rugby League
10. Rugby Union



FOCUS ON FOOTY

Australian Rules is one of the most popular participation and spectator sports in Australia – it also rates number one on the most injury-prone list.

The speed and full body contact nature of the sport and the constant physical competition for the ball places players at risk of injury.

The most common type of injury is to the lower limbs (such as hamstring, knee and ankle sprains). Upper limb injuries, including shoulder strains and finger injuries, and collision type injuries are more common amongst junior and community level participants. Head injuries also occur and can be potentially serious.

There are numerous ways that Aussie Rules players – regardless of whether they play elite, amateur, community or social competition – can reduce their risk on the field, including:

- undertaking appropriate pre-season conditioning;
- warming-up for at least 20 minutes before a game, including stretching and slow jogging;
- ensuring that they're adequately hydrated before, during and after the game;
- avoiding alcohol consumption for 48 hours before a game;
- wearing a mouthguard (preferably a custom made one) at all times during games and training;
- players with a history of ankle injury should wear some form of support, such as taping, and thigh protectors are recommended for those who have recently suffered a corks thigh; and
- if an injury is sustained, seek medical advice and only return to playing when the injured area has fully recovered.

DESPITE MORE PRECAUTION, ACCIDENTS STILL OCCUR

Approximately 5.2 million Australians suffer sports-related injuries each year.⁶

Medibank Private's Safe Sports Report 2006 found that about one in five of its members suffered a sports injury in the past year.

The highest risk age group for injury was 18 to 24 year-olds.

Overall, the most common injuries were: knee (16%); ankle (11%); general bruising and cuts (8%); and back (7%).⁷ For people aged over 40, the most common injuries were calf, thigh and hamstring strains. With

increasing age, injury risk rises due to changes in tissue flexibility and repair capacity.

Pleasingly, almost all Medibank Private members said that they took precautions to prevent injuries; and compared with 2004's survey results, an increased percentage warm up and cool down.

Despite taking proactive measures to minimise injury risk, three in five survey participants attributed their injury to an accident or 'bad luck'. Only one in six believed their injury was due to a lack of preventative measures.

Dr Peter Larkins says that the fact that many injuries are not the result of poor preparation or protection, but rather 'bad luck', highlights the need for casual and regular sportspersons to have private health insurance.

"In general, the active population is taking greater precautions against injury when exercising than in the past, however, the incidence of injury is not showing a corresponding reduction," Dr Larkins said.

INCREASED INJURY WOES IN WINTER

Sports injury rates peak during the winter months of May, June and July, which is not surprising because cold muscles, tendons and ligaments increase your risk of being hurt.

Some suggestions for sports training in cold conditions include:

- wear appropriate warm clothing;
- multiple layers of clothing trap more body heat than one bulky item;
- devote more time to warming up and stretching before exercising;
- keep up your fluid intake as the cold weather can still cause fluid loss; and
- wear sun protection, particularly if you're at the snow.

⁵Based on patient presentations to Australian hospital emergency departments and general medical practices, collated by Dr Peter Larkins (2006).

⁶Data extrapolated using methodology developed in a Latrobe Valley sports and injury study (derived from Finch, C., Cassell, E. and Stathakis, V. 'The Epidemiology of sport and recreation the Latrobe Valley', MUARC report no. 151), demonstrating the extent of sports injuries across Australia.

⁷Medibank Private members' survey results, 2005.

⁸Medibank Private members' survey results, 2005.

⁹Medibank Private members' survey results, 2005.

COSTS OF INJURY – MORE THAN JUST MONEY

According to Medibank Private's research, knee injuries are the most common in Australia, with average surgery and treatment costs between \$11,000 and \$16,500.

For the approximate 7% of Australian sports participants who suffer back and spinal injuries, their average medical, surgical and rehabilitation costs are between \$15,750 and \$22,000.

These are costs which patients who don't have private health insurance would be required to fork out themselves – a massive additional stress on top of the injury set-back.

Further to the physical and financial costs, sports injuries can also take an emotional and social toll when participants have to remain on the sidelines for a considerable length of time to recover.

Sports injuries can be very inconvenient and mean having to miss work (and social engagements) for rest and rehabilitation therapy.

The *Medibank Private Safe Sports Report 2006* found more people took time off work due to an injury (with 27% taking an average of 11 days off work) than the *Medibank Private Sports Injuries Report 2004* when 15% took an average of nine days off work.⁸

MOST COMMON INJURY TYPES AND THEIR APPROX. COST RANGES

Knee	\$11,000 to \$16,500
Ankle	\$4,400 to \$6,600
Foot and Achilles	\$5,500 to \$6,600
Back	\$15,750 to \$22,000
Shoulder	\$5,500 to \$7,700
Forearm/wrist	\$4,400 to \$6,600
Elbow	\$4,400 to \$6,600

AEROBICS AND DANCE

Dancing for exercise and fun is increasing in popularity in Australia. From ballet and hip-hop to salsa and the resurgence of break dancing, the range of styles and lessons available is extensive.

It is important to remember that dancing is a 'sport' and it places similar demands on your body and exposure to injury risk as aerobics. Both involve movement of large muscle groups and during the body's motion to the music, either one foot or both feet loose contact with the ground at most times.

Common injuries sustained while participating in aerobics or dancing include: muscular sprains and strains; shin pain and stress fractures; tendonitis

(i.e. painful inflammation of the tendons); blisters and bruised or ingrown toe nails from ill-fitting shoes; and bruises caused by impact injuries, such as trips or bumps. Back injury may also be aggravated.

Some of the injury risk factors associated with aerobics and dancing are: beginners who don't have the fitness, skills or technique to meet the physical demands; poor posture; tiredness and over-training; an unsafe environment, e.g. hard or uneven floor surface; poor footwear; and not resting an existing injury before returning to the aerobics studio or dance floor.

Some simple safety tips to reduce your risk of being hurt are:

- wear layers of clothing that you can take off as your body warms up;
- do warm-up stretches before you begin and focus on your feet and ankles – cold muscles are more prone to injury;
- keep hydrated;
- don't push yourself too far or too fast, particularly if you're a beginner; and
- sports bras are recommended to improve comfort.

THE GOOD NEWS ON EXERCISE — WHY IT'S WORTH THE RISK

It's a 'no brainer' that exercise offers huge health and well-being benefits, but some of the facts about its positive effects are lesser known than others. Some of the benefits of regular physical activity include:

- lower blood pressure and cholesterol;
- reduction of body fat and improved levels of strength;
- improved body shape, weight control and tone;
- lower stress and anxiety levels;
- improved mental wellbeing;
- increased concentration and work performance;
- better glucose utilisation; and
- increased likelihood of a longer and healthier life.

Exercising regularly can also reduce the probability of developing heart disease, diabetes, mental illness and many types of cancers (particularly breast and colon cancers).

Avoiding exercise because of the chance of being injured can be far worse for your health.



NO MORE EXCUSES

'I haven't got anyone to exercise with.'

'It's too cold.'

'I get bored at the gym.'

'I haven't got time.'

'I'll start tomorrow/next week/after Christmas.'

Sound familiar? While most of us have good intentions about doing more exercise, we often find excuses for not putting this plan in to action.

Many Australians lead busy lives, so it's not surprising that the primary reason given for not exercising is 'lack of time'. One remedy for time-poor people is to build physical activity into the things they have to do anyway. Consider putting in some leg work and walk, rather than drive or take public transport, to work or meetings. Put more energy into doing day-to-day domestic activities, such as cleaning, vacuuming, shopping and gardening.

'I'm too tired'

Strange as it may seem, that's why you really need to do more physical activity. Being more active actually gives you more energy. Physical activity also helps you sleep better so you should feel less tired in the long run.

'I'm not the sporty type'

You don't need to be. Physical activity isn't the same as sport — you don't have to go near a football oval or aerobics class if you don't want to. Walking is an ideal activity, as it doesn't require any special equipment — just a comfortable pair of shoes — and it gets you out in the fresh air.

'I'm too old to start being active now'

The majority of people, whatever their age or condition, can benefit from physical activity. Being active can be an important factor in staying healthy and keeping your independence as you get older.

As well as helping your heart and lungs to work efficiently, maintaining a healthy weight and keeping your muscles and bones strong, regular physical activity can help control high blood pressure and diabetes. It can also:

- slow down the loss of bone density that can lead to fractures;
- help you maintain your mobility and independence;
- improve your posture, balance, flexibility and coordination; and,
- help you cope with everyday tasks.

FOLLOW THE DOCTOR'S ORDERS

A FINAL WORD FROM DR LARKINS

Dr Peter Larkins has the following recommendations to reduce the risk of injury when participating in physical activity.

- Get the correct advice on the right activity program for you. Speak to your GP, a fitness instructor at your local gym or a personal trainer.
- Warm up and cool down. Warming up before exercise is the best way to reduce the risk of injury because cold joints, tendons and muscles are more likely to get sprained or strained by sudden movement or exertion. It increases muscle blood flow, joint mobility and muscle flexibility. Cooling down helps to prevent soreness and assists recovery of the muscles. It also stabilises your heart and blood pressure rate.
- Make sure you have the correct equipment for your activity and look after it.
- Begin slowly and gradually build up to the challenge.
- Use tape or strapping to brace vulnerable joints, (e.g. ankles and fingers) to prevent them from slipping beyond their safe range of motion.
- Keep hydrated – you can lose around one-and-a-half litres of fluid for every hour of exercise.
- Listen to your body – make sure you have at least one recovery day, and preferably two recovery days, each week.
- Injuries need to rest – trying to 'work through' the pain will cause more damage to soft muscle tissue and delay healing.
- If you have an existing medical condition or have been inactive for a long time, see your doctor before beginning any exercise program. Progress at your own pace and don't overdo it.

medibank
P R I V A T E

Medibank Private Limited (ABN 47 080 890 259)
is a registered health benefits organisation.

GPO Box 9999, Melbourne, Victoria, 3001

Tel: 132331

Email: ask_us@medibank.com.au

Web: www.medibank.com.au

