

Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois/Illinois Laser Center/Advanced Extremity Imaging Important Injury Prevention Tips for Pickleball Players

Article provided by the Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois

According to the Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) topline participation report, Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in America and has grown over two-hundred percent since 2020. A sport that was once considered to be the “new” shuffleboard for seniors, is gaining popularity among younger players too. The average age for pickleball players is 35. There are over ten thousand pickleball court locations in the US and 13.6 million players.

According to Dr. John M. Sigle, a recognized foot and ankle surgeon in central Illinois, “Interest in pickleball has grown significantly since the COVID pandemic. A lot of indoor and outdoor tennis courts in the area have been converted into pickleball courts.”

Some experts claim that pickleball injuries have doubled in the past year. According to Dr. Sigle, “Pickleball is a pretty intense sport that has a lot of explosive lateral movements that put considerable stress on the feet and ankles, tendons and ligaments, and calf muscles.”

Here are some of the more common foot and ankle injuries:

- **Inversion Ankle Sprains** are common when the foot twists and rolls inward causing the outer ligaments to stretch or tear.
- **Plantar Fasciitis** (heel pain) occurs when the plantar fascia (the band of tissue along the bottom of the foot that connects the toes to the heel bone) gets inflamed because of excessive strain.
- **Achilles Tendonitis** often occurs when the Achilles tendon (the band that



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connects the heel to the calf muscle) is strained because of overuse. Unfortunately, this condition sometimes results in an Achilles tendon rupture, often requiring surgery.

- **Stress Fractures** in the feet and ankles may be caused by overuse and high load bearing impacts. Stress fractures and tiny bone splinters may gradually appear if foot pain is over-looked or not addressed quickly.
- **Toenail Fungus** commonly occurs among athletes because of exposure to infected locker and shower rooms and exposure to damp shoes that harbor toenail fungus (Onychomycosis) and athletes’ foot (Tinea Pedis).

When Dr. Sigle was asked about steps that could be taken to prevent foot and ankle injuries, here are some of his suggestions:

- **Pre-match Warmup.** Get to the courts 10-15 minutes early to raise your body temperature and increase

blood flow to your muscles before you start your match. You can begin by doing a couple sets of light jogging from side to side, followed by dynamic stretches, hip openers, shoulder circles, forearm and wrist circles, knee bends, ankle circles, calf stretches, side-stepping in both directions, forward and backward lunges, and mimicking pickleball movements.

- **Select Proper Footwear.** Your feet and ankles are subjected to constant movement, pivoting, and jumping so wearing appropriate footwear and socks are essential. Choose shoes that provide adequate, support, cushioning, and traction.
- **Use Custom Orthotics.** Schedule an appointment with your podiatrist to see if you’re a good candidate for a custom orthotic. Custom orthotics will minimize stress on your feet and ankles and help you extend your play with less pain and inflammation.

- **Cool Down After Play.** It is important to help your body return to its normal state after play. Stretching will reduce muscle stiffness and speeds up recovery.
- **Rest, Ice, Compression, and Elevation.** These are the basic standards of care following play to reduce foot pain and inflammation.
- **Laser Treatment for Toenail Fungus.** State of the art lasers are used to treat toenail fungus. Treatments are pain-free, quick, and effective.
- **Pain Therapy Laser Treatments.** Laser treatments are now being used by collegiate and professional sports teams to speed up healing, reduce pain and inflammation, and help players return to sport safely and quickly.

Most minor foot and ankle injuries may be taken care of at home but do not hesitate to contact your provider or podiatrist if you experience severe pain, inflammation, deformity, or instability. If your symptoms do not improve within a day or two, contact the **Foot & Ankle Center at (217)787-2700** or book on-line for immediate medical attention. Serious complications can occur from a delay in diagnosis and treatment.

Advanced board-certified podiatrists are available to see you within twenty-four hours. The Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois is located in Springfield, Decatur, Shelbyville, and Carlinville.

Visit myfootandanklecenter.com for information regarding the most advanced imaging and laser treatments available in central Illinois.

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