

Preventing and Managing Injuries

by John Buckley

Judo is a full-contact combat sport and players must realise that to participate carries the risk of injury. To put things into perspective however, the frequency and severity of judo injuries is not as common as in other similar body contact sports, such as football.

As a member of SUJC, you are part of a small and caring community. We do not wish to see people hurt doing something they enjoy – but if they are, we want them to be properly treated and to return to training as soon as possible.

Suffering an injury when playing sport carries a number of consequences. There is the obvious immediate pain and discomfort, inconvenience through loss of mobility, inability to attend studies or work, medical expenses, loss of wages, etc. Prevention and management of injuries should therefore be of interest to all judoka.

On the brighter side, there are few people who have played the sport for any length of time who have not been injured at some stage of their career. The pain goes, bodies heal, and in almost every case you will be able to return to training.

Preventing Judo Injuries

Probably the single most important factor in preventing judo injuries is a thorough warm-up routine. This is largely the responsibility of the coach, but individual players share this responsibility – especially if they arrive late for a training session.

Warming Up

Warm-up exercises do more than heat the body. The most important part of the warm-up is to minimise risk of injury by gently and progressively stretching the ligaments and activating the muscles (stretching and contracting them). We need to get blood into the muscles but also need to be careful not to give them complex or strenuous exercise before muscles and joints have been moved and stretched.

Initial exercises should be very simple – e.g. jogging around the mat – to get things started. As the body warms, additional movements can be included to activate different parts – back, shoulders/arms, abdominals. More strenuous exercises, such as sprinting and explosive jumps, should be last, only after thorough preparation.

The warm-up should be methodical, and cover all parts of the body.

Stretching

As for the warm-up, the stretching routine must cover all areas of the body. Stretching is best done following the warm-up.

Develop a stretching routine that starts at one end of the body and moves to the other, e.g. neck, shoulders, arms, trunk, lower back and abdominals, legs, hamstrings, quadriceps, calves. Don't forget the 'extremities' – wrists, fingers, ankles, toes. Your stretching routine should be one that you can do on your own, without a coach's supervision. This means you will be able to use it at tournaments as you do your warm-up.

When stretching, avoid ballistic or 'bounce' movements as these can actually tear muscles. Use a static stretch in each position for at least 8-10 seconds.

Fitness

In addition to a proper warm-up and stretching regime, being fit also reduces the risk of injury. Attend the dojo regularly, and if possible do some supplementary training – walking, running, cycling, swimming, etc. Check the Training Suggestions page on the SUJC website for the water circuit, judo circuit and uchikomi training if you are adventurous, and especially if you are serious about your competitive career.

Not everyone can train regularly, so it is important to know your limits and not to overdo it.

Immediate Treatment

Quick treatment of injuries will assist in reducing recovery time.

The club has a number of people trained in First Aid. They will normally be the first source of assistance if you are injured, and will also arrange or recommend further treatment.

Application of ice as soon as possible to sprains, strains and knocks is an important initial treatment that will mean a shorter recovery time. Ice reduces internal bleeding, thus reducing muscle spasm (tightening), thereby reducing pain. Ice also reduces the amount of blood circulating in the area by causing blood vessels to contract and minimises swelling.

When applying ice to injuries, cover the skin, or apply oil to avoid frostbite. Apply ice for periods of about ten minutes on and ten minutes off for an hour or more, depending on the severity of the injury. Judo players should always have a supply of ice, or cool packs in the fridge at home, just in case.

Elevating the injured part and application of a compression bandage can also help reduce internal bleeding and swelling. Compression bandages should be removed at least every twenty minutes to avoid restricting circulation.

Medical Treatment

As the TV commercials say, if pain persists see your doctor! Some injuries will respond to simple First Aid and rest, but be alert to continuing symptoms. Pain is the body's warning system – listen to it!

With most injuries that prevent training for any period, seek medical advice as to the recommended timing and nature of your return to the mat. Sports medicine practitioners are probably the best source of advice, as they understand better not only the nature of sports injuries, but also the psyche of athletes (“I'd rather die than miss training!”).

Stay in Touch

As with any other ailment, having a sports injury can be a lonely experience - the pain and inconvenience seem unique to you. Depending on your level of involvement in the sport, missing training can be a depressing period, and you may feel 'out of it' as the rest of us get on with enjoying ourselves.

If you are injured, try to stay in touch with the club and let someone know how you are progressing.

When you can, come along and join in other club activities – the Committee will always welcome offers of assistance in the many administrative jobs to be done.

Getting Back to Training

There are many ways of returning progressively to training, depending on your injury and degree of incapacitation:

- Just doing the warm-up and stretching routine
- Specific remedial exercise programs
- Solo body movement exercises
- Light uchikomi, either with a partner, or using the rubber tube
- Working on technique improvement
- Developing techniques that do not stress the injured part
- Only doing groundwork
- Training on the crash mat
- Avoiding the randori session
- Light randori with partners you trust

An important part of rehabilitation after injury is to restore confidence. This is particularly the case if you have been away for a long time, and if surgery has been involved. The body may be OK, but the mind is still suffering. With your coach's supervision and advice you can progressively work on restoring self-belief.

Summary

In many sports, especially vigorous, full contact activities like judo, injuries are a fact of life. With care, they can be largely prevented and their effects minimised. All judoka should be aware of the principles of injury prevention and management and incorporate them in their training routines.