

ACL injuries in young female athletes now an epidemic

1 May 2014, by Jim Ritter

(Medical Xpress)—With young female athletes experiencing an epidemic of ACL knee injuries, a Loyola University Medical Center sports medicine specialist is urging parents to demand that coaches implement injury-prevention programs.

Female athletes who play basketball and soccer are two to eight times more likely to suffer an ACL [injury](#) compared with male athletes, according to the American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine.

The epidemic is getting worse as more girls and young women play sports, said orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Pietro Tonino, director of Loyola's orthopaedic Sports Medicine department. And summer is a peak time for injuries because many girls and young women are playing soccer and other sports.

"I'm tired of seeing so many girls and [young women](#) with ACL injuries in my clinic," Tonino said. "Many of these injuries could be prevented with a simple warm-up program that can be done in minutes."

Tonino said one such program is FIFA 11+, a warm-up program designed to reduce injuries among soccer players. The program should be performed as a standard warm-up at the start of each training session at least twice a week. It takes about 20 minutes.

Teams that perform FIFA 11+ at least twice a week experience 30 percent to 50 percent fewer injured players, according to FIFA, the governing body of the World Cup and other international soccer tournaments.

The anterior cruciate ligament, or ACL, is one of the four major ligaments of the knee. It connects the front of the tibia (shinbone) with the back of the femur (thighbone). It helps provide stability to the knee joint. Patients with torn ACLs often

experience their knee "giving out." ACL injuries also increase the risk of arthritis.

Minor ACL tears can be treated nonsurgically. But significant ACL tears require surgery. An orthopaedic surgeon removes a tendon from the patient's knee and uses it to replace the torn ligament. Surgical instruments and techniques are improving, and ACL surgery is becoming less invasive. Nevertheless, the operation still requires six months of rehab, Tonino said.

Tonino has performed thousands of surgeries to repair ACL tears.

"We can get athletes back on the field or the court, and they can perform at very high levels," Tonino said. "But a reconstructed knee can never be as good as a God-given [knee](#). So athletes, coaches and parents should do everything possible to prevent ACL injuries. Spending a few minutes on injury-prevention exercises at the beginning of practice can benefit [athletes](#) for the rest of their lives."

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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