

# SENIOR LIFESTYLE



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## Foot & Ankle Injury Prevention Tips for Senior Athletes

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This year's 2019 National Senior Games took place in Albuquerque, New Mexico June 14-24, 2019, under sunny blue skies. The Games consisted of a 20-sport biennial competition for men and women who were 50 years of age and older. Over 13,500 athletes competed from each state in the US. Athletes from Barbados, Bolivia, Canada, Mexico, Slovakia, Sweden, Trinidad, and Tobago also joined in the event. This is the largest multi-sport in the world for seniors. The theme of the National Senior Games Association is "Long Live the Challenge"®; and I can assure you that all of the athletes were striving for success every day!

Most participants were life-long athletes who had a passion for their sport and competition. Each athlete had a personal reason for competing.

For some, it was to stand on the podium and receive a medal. For some, it was a life changer and personal affirmation to live a healthier lifestyle. For others, it was a motivation to continue their sport despite having major physical limitations. Some were cancer survivors. Some had pacemakers and spine surgery; while others had total ankle, knee, hip, and shoulder replacements.

I am quite certain that the competition for the majority of the athletes will not stop after the games ended. They all seemed to embrace the "it ain't over til it's over" philosophy. Perhaps age is a state of mind but Father Time reduces muscle strength, reflexes, agility, speed, and energy. Consequently, proper conditioning, physical modifications, and fitness gear become critical to reduce the chance of injury.



John M. Sigle DPM, FACFAS



Gary Gaver, 2017 National Senior Games gold medalist

### SENIOR ATHLETES SUSCEPTIBLE TO FOOT PROBLEMS

During the summer months, athletic and recreational programs are in full swing. Despite the differences among the sports, all participants are susceptible to foot and ankle problems. Here are some of the more common questions my patients ask and helpful tips to prevent foot and ankle injuries during tennis and pickleball, golf, and running.

### TENNIS AND PICKLEBALL

Tennis and Pickleball are particularly stressful on your feet because of the quick starts and stops and lateral movements from side to side. Common foot problems include ankle sprains, stress fractures, plantar fasciitis, tennis toe, Achilles tendonitis and rupture.

### •INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

If you have weak ankles or history of sprains, wear a simple ankle brace inside your shoe. Select a stable tennis shoe that is not too rigid and provides flexibility to perform. The shoe should provide durable toe support. Custom orthotics is recommended to provide arch and joint support. Proper warm-up and stretching are also important. These actions will help flexibility, relieve foot pain, and extend playing time.

### GOLF

Golf is stressful on your feet and ankles because of excessive walking up and down hills. Common problems for golfers include: heel pain, tendonitis, Metatarsalgia (ball of foot pain), capsulitis (inflammatory



Mixed Doubles Gary Garver and Kathy Sigle

condition affecting the outer lining of the foot), and ligament sprains and pulls that keep the golf enthusiasts off the greens. Improper shoes can also cause blisters, neuromas, and other foot and ankle pain.

### •INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

Walking up and down hills is a normal motion that puts abnormal stress on your Achilles tendon. Walking on uneven surfaces puts a lot of strain on the tendons along the outer portion of the ankle. If you don't stretch before hand, you will put a lot of wear and tear on your muscles that may lead to severe tendonitis. If you use arch supports in your shoes, you will be surprised how much better your feet feel at the end of a round of golf.

### RUNNING

Gravity tends to come into play more during running and a considerable more stress is placed on your feet. The 26 bones, 33 joints, 112 ligaments, and network of tendons, nerves, and blood vessels all work together in the foot while running and take on maximum stress. Common foot problems that occur are plantar fasciitis (heel pain), Achilles tendonitis, Metatarsalgia, Morton's Neuroma (fibrous tissue around the nerve in the foot), blisters, corns, calluses, Athletes foot, Onychomycosis (toenail fungus), and shin splints.

### •INJURY PREVENTION TIPS

Runners should properly condition their body, build a routine, and stretch their muscles, tendons, and ligaments before and after each run. Proper running shoes are critical.



Kathy Sigle, 2019 National Senior Games silver medalist

Shoes should provide flexibility in the right places to help with shock absorption. More rigidity is needed in the middle of the foot. The heel should sit low in the shoe and the cushioned sole should be slightly wider than a walking shoe to absorb impact. Custom orthotics will reduce stress on lower extremities and allow you to run with less fatigue. Keep your feet powdered and dry and wear clean socks. Shoes hold moisture so alternate shoes with each run. If you develop recurring and/or increasing aches and pains, contact a podiatrist to help pinpoint the problem and prevent more serious injury or long-term damage to your feet.

Enjoy your summer fitness activities and avoid foot and ankle injuries. Seek medical assistance if your foot and ankle pain does not get resolved from rest and conservative treatments. Many injuries may become serious and cause further problems if not properly diagnosed. Standard X-rays may not provide sufficient images to diagnosis actual conditions. MRIs and CT Scans may be necessary to obtain a definitive diagnosis.

Contact the Foot & Ankle Center of Illinois at (217) 787-2700 to schedule an appointment with advanced board certified foot and ankle surgeons. Clinics are located in Springfield, Decatur, Taylorville, Carlinville, Shelbyville, and Sullivan, IL. Visit [myfootandanklecenter.com](http://myfootandanklecenter.com) to learn about new laser technology used to by professional sports teams to reduce pain and inflammation and eliminate toenail fungus. Also learn about advanced imaging technology available to accurately diagnose your condition.

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- Dr. John Sigle

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