



Hurling Injuries 101

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Hurling is an outdoor team game of ancient Gaelic and Irish origin and has been played for more than 3,000 years. Hurling is now played all over the world. In the United States there are currently more than 130 clubs with participation in approximately 50 cities across the country. The objective is for players to use a long, flat tapered stick called a hurley to propel a small, spherical ball called a sliotar between the opponent's goalposts either under the crossbar into a net for three points, or over the crossbar for one point.

The sliotar may be caught in the hand but not carried for more than four steps, struck on the ground, or struck in the air by the hurley. It may be slapped by an open hand for short range passing. Much of the game takes place in the air, and it has been called the fastest game on grass. The game is played on a large grass pitch approximately 150 yards long and 95 yards wide.

Historically the game of hurling was associated with head and facial injuries due to the highly physical nature of the sport and the potential for injury by the hurley or sliotar. Early studies demonstrated the value of wearing head protection gear.¹ In one prospective study of hurling injuries treated in a hospital setting, 41% of injuries of non helmeted players involved the head versus only 13% of helmeted users; moreover, only three percent of players using helmet and faceguard protection suffered facial trauma versus 21% of helmeted only players. Since 2010 the use of helmets with faceguard protection are mandatory for all players at all levels.

Hand injuries have been noted to be common to hurling comprising 52-56% of emergency room visits.^{1,2} The majority of hand injuries sustained from the blow of a hurley are fractures compared to cuts and bruises. There are commercially available hand protection gloves

available; however, there are currently no rules enforcing this type of equipment. Despite the high rates of hand injury only 8-10% of players reported the regular use of hand protection, due to concerns of bulkiness, diminished movement, or ineffectiveness.^{2,3}

Prospective studies have demonstrated different injury patterns in hurling compared to those studies evaluating emergency room visits. Injuries were found to occur almost 20 times more frequently in match play versus training sessions.^{4,5} The majority of injuries were to the lower extremity with hamstring strains being most common.⁴⁻⁶ Fractures were still noted more frequently in the upper extremities compared to the lower extremities. In addition, overuse injuries are also a consideration for players and should be addressed by coaches who should not push players to train too hard and too fast, early in the season.

References

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