

## Injury Prevention Starts With First Step

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Recent media attention about young athletes and soccer injuries is a good reminder of the obvious: prevent injuries with proper training. Research shows that appropriate pre-season and in-season training can help to prevent injuries by as much as 25 percent. But as soccer clubs across Minnesota move toward the start of a new season in coming months, some might ask: What is “proper training?”

*First Step for Soccer* is an injury prevention and performance enhancement program developed by Minnesota Sports Medicine, MYSA’s official sports medicine provider. As a video/DVD and companion manual, First Step details a progressive program that combines the latest in sports medicine research with soccer-specific exercises and drills designed to prepare young athletes for the rigors of soccer before and during the season. Coaching tips highlight technique and timing strategies.

Here’s a sampling of exercises and drills from *First Step* that help to reduce injury risk and back a winning season. For a program preview, visit [www.mnsportsmed.org/health](http://www.mnsportsmed.org/health) to view “Video” or borrow the program from the lending library at MYSA.

### **First Step Warm-up**

A soccer-specific warm-up helps to prepare the whole body for an active practice or game that will include high kicks, cuts, sprints and jumps. The First Step Warm-up was developed by former Minnesota Thunder mid-fielder and record-holder Pierre Morice. The Warm-up can be completed while moving in a circle or back and forth across the field and helps to build camaraderie before a game. Begin the Warm-up with an easy two-to-three minute jog and follow each 30-second warm-up action with relaxed jogging.

#### **Sample Warm-up: 7-12 minutes**

Skip with Arm Movements	Ball Scoopers
Shoulder Rolls Forward and Back	Carioca
Hop and Twist	Close Hip/Open Hip
Glut Kickers	Toe Touchers
Hot Feet	Headers

### **Core Strength**

Great sports performance starts with developing the “core” or the powerhouse of the body, which includes the deep abdominals, low back and buttock muscles. A strong core translates into more efficient movement, better power, balance, strength and endurance — all important to developing soccer skills and improved performance.

#### **Core Strength Exercises: 8-10 minutes**

- Abdominal Crunch with Neutral Pelvis (pelvis doesn’t move)
- Reverse Curl with Soccer Ball (from sitting, soccer ball between knees)
- Opposite Arm and Leg Lifts (lying on stomach)

### **Agility and Balance**

Agility training is particularly useful to soccer players who spend much of the game cutting, pivoting and moving side to side. Balance is key to maintaining form in potentially dangerous situations, such as kicking the ball with force or twisting on one leg.

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### **Agility and Balance Exercises and Drills: 10-15 minutes**

- Single Leg Balance (stand on one leg with good alignment)
- Back Pedal (backward runs with focus on quick, small foot steps)
- Carioca (grapevines to develop speed for side-to-side motion)
- Lateral Shuffles (wide steps moving sideways, body low to ground)

### **Leg Strengthening**

Research shows that strength training can reduce sports-related injuries by as much as 50 percent. Not only that, strength-training can help improve coordination and confidence, contributing to improved performance on the field.

### **Leg Strengthening Exercises: 10-15 minutes**

- Partner Wall Sit
- Side Squats
- Single Leg Squats
- Stationary Lunges

### **Plyometric Jump Training**

The combination of speed and strength leads to power, an integral component of soccer. Jumping, bounding and hopping can be improved with plyometrics, a unique training method that uses explosive muscular contractions to simulate those needed on the field. The rest phase is as important as the exercise. Try to follow a one to three ratio: for every 15 seconds of motion, use 45 seconds of rest.

### **Plyometric Jump Training**

- Tap and Tuck Jumps (emphasizing light landing, toe to heel)
- 180-Degree Jumps

### **Flexibility**

Stretching after soccer practice or a game helps to decrease muscle soreness and promotes muscle balance. Flexibility exercises can easily be included as a cool down or during team Warm-ups and announcements.

### **Flexibility Exercises: 5-10 minutes**

- Low Back Stretch (lie on back with knees to chest)
- Quadriceps (front of thigh) and Hamstrings (back of thigh)
- Calf Stretch
- Hip Flexor Stretch (front of hip)

*Minnesota Sports Medicine is a network of sports medicine and orthopedic doctors who see athletes at medical clinics throughout the Twin Cities. Minnesota Sports Medicine is proud to be the official sports medicine provider for the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association. . To learn more or to view clips of the First Step DVD/video, visit [www.mnsportsmed.org](http://www.mnsportsmed.org) or call 612-273-4800.*