

SAINT FRANCIS SPORTS MEDICINE

Making athletes of all ages BETTER, STRONGER, FASTER since 1995.

- ⊕ Cross-Training Builds Overall Fitness and Reduces Injury Risk
- ⊕ Preseason Conditioning Helps Keep Athletes In the Game
- ⊕ Focus On Core Strength and Cardio, Regardless of Sport



Cross-Training Builds Overall Fitness and Reduces Injury Risk

If variety is the spice of life, then cross-training certainly adds a dash of diversity to a workout routine.

Cross-training refers to any form of exercise that is different from the primary exercises an athlete typically performs. For example, a pool workout would constitute cross-training for any athlete other than a swimmer, while weight training qualifies as a cross-training workout for virtually every sport.



Joe Willis, MAT, ATC

“Some athletes focus so intently on their sport’s specific movements that they fail to realize there are benefits that come from performing other activities,” notes Joe Willis, MAT, ATC, certified athletic trainer at Saint Francis Medical Center. “Cross-training minimizes the injury risk of overworking one set of muscles at the expense of another.”

For example, strengthening exercises for the hips and hamstrings help offset the natural imbalance that distance runners have with strong quads, while running and other cardio work builds endurance in athletes that typically focus more on strength, such as football players and wrestlers.

“As with any workout, the best cross-training results come from a gradual increase in intensity,” Willis says. “Mixing aerobic, flexibility and strength training creates a well-rounded athlete and helps minimize preventable injuries.”

For more information, please call the Sports Medicine team at Saint Francis Medical Center at 573-331-5153.

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Preseason Conditioning Helps Keep Athletes In the Game

It is said that championships are won in the offseason. The same is true regarding injury prevention.

Young athletes have the physical advantage that youth brings in terms of general fitness, but the difference between merely surviving a competitive season and excelling lies in adequate preseason preparation.

“Many of the injuries we see come from athletes who increase the demands on their body too quickly,” explains Joe Willis, MAT, ATC, certified athletic trainer at Saint Francis Medical Center. “The first weeks of organized practice produce a high proportion of injuries for that reason and many of them are preventable.”

Preseason strength and conditioning are as important as sport-specific skill development in the overall improvement cycle of an athlete. This preparation reduces the likelihood of injuries such as muscle strains and tendinitis, and heat-related illness due to lack of acclimation.

At Southeast Missouri State University preseason football camp, Willis and the athletic training team monitor the players’ health at several points during two-a-day practices. Players weigh in before and after each practice, and they must replenish every pound lost with 16 ounces of liquid. Post-practice treatments are available in the morning and over lunch.

“The players work with the strength and conditioning staff for 45 minutes in the afternoon on days when there is only one practice,” Willis says. “The goal at this point in the year is to regenerate and recover.”

Maintaining a healthy balance between training and rest allows the body to recover sufficiently and further avoid injury. Overtraining for any sport also generates mental strain, which can lead to flat performances and even burnout.

“As a general rule, athletes should limit increases in workout intensity, weight or duration to 10 percent per week,” Willis says. “Gradually increasing workouts over a six- to eight-week period provides the safest route to optimal performance.”

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Focus On Core Strength and Cardio, Regardless of Sport

Coaches and athletes are realizing the benefits of core strengthening and cardiovascular conditioning, even if their sports do not immediately come to mind regarding these respective fitness activities.

“Football players – even linemen – certainly gain from cardio work, while cross country runners also benefit from having a strong core,” notes Joe Willis, MAT, ATC, certified athletic trainer at Saint Francis Medical Center who works with the Southeast Missouri State University football program. “Training the total athlete should be the goal of every conditioning program.”

Using a limited set of muscles for one activity results in a false sense of overall fitness and can lead to repetitive-use injuries. Flexibility exercises also enhance athletic capabilities and play a role in injury prevention.

The core is able to transmit power generated by the hips more effectively when those muscles are sufficiently strengthened and ready to perform. The psychological component of having built an improved state of overall fitness also creates an advantage for the athlete.

“Working the same sets of muscles all the time creates an imbalance that often leads to injury,” Willis adds. “Consider the benefits of maintaining optimal performance levels into the fourth quarter of a football game or on the hills late in a cross country race. That comes from preparing the body for these scenarios with all-around fitness.”

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