



## **Sports injury? Get onto it early**

As Rugby World Cup fever sweeps New Zealand, sports physio Rob Cashman has a word of caution for those keen to throw themselves into the sport.

Rob – a sports physio who has worked with the NZ Rugby Union, NZ All Whites and NZ Cricket, says: “People who play high-contact sports like rugby and soccer, or any sport involving sudden changes of direction, are prone to injuries that if not properly treated, could lead to arthritis.”

Early treatment of sports injuries – especially to backs, knees and hips – is vital to help avoid the onset of arthritis, says Rob, who’s currently the physio for the NZ Blacksox softball team.

Osteoarthritis, a painful condition caused by ‘wear and tear’ on weight-bearing joints such as hips and knees, leads to decreased mobility because the tendons and ligaments tighten up to try and protect the joint. In serious cases, it can result in the need for joint replacement surgery.

But Rob has good news: “If you’ve got osteoarthritis or think you’re at risk of developing it – that doesn’t mean it’s all over. Early detection and the right sort of therapy can significantly slow down the progress of the symptoms and in some cases you can pretty much get back to normal. You may also avoid joint replacements in later life.”

Rob advises that if you get an injured joint and it doesn’t completely settle down within 10 days, call your local physio.

“They’ll assess your injury and can refer you for x-rays or to a specialist if necessary. Often, the physio will be able to take you through the healing process without need for referral to anyone else.”

Rob says it’s usually a three-step process:

- The physio will restore mobility to the joint by gentle manual therapy
- Supervised and home-based exercises to strengthen muscles around the joint
- Functional re-training – helping you to correct problems with your posture and joint alignment

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## Lifestyle tips

- Warm up your muscles before exercise, and cool them down afterwards
- If you injure a joint, seek treatment from a physio if it hasn't totally settled within 10 days
  - To find a physio, go to [www.physiotherapy.org.nz](http://www.physiotherapy.org.nz) and click on 'find a physio'
- Maintain a healthy weight. This reduces stress on your hips, knees and feet
- Keep moving – aim for at least half an hour of enjoyable exercise most days
  - Walking, cycling and swimming are ideal
  - Chunk your exercise down into shorter blocks of time if you want
  - Keep an exercise diary so you can monitor yourself
- Eat a diet rich in fruit and veg, and low in salt, sugar and fat – this helps to keep your weight within a healthy range
- Wear shoes with thick, soft soles that act as shock absorbers for your feet, knees, hips and back, especially when exercising
- If any of your joints are stiff and aching – see a physio. They can assess you and then treat you or refer you to a doctor or specialist
- If you have osteoarthritis, see your physio at least once a year to brush up your motivation and refresh your treatment plan
- To find out more about osteoarthritis, go to [www.arthritis.org.nz](http://www.arthritis.org.nz)