

# How hip injuries can be the secret cause of other problems

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that the runner or cyclist of tomorrow is often the field-sport player of today. The runner of today might be a cyclist and hillwalker in 30 years' time.

Put another way, the competitive athlete will become a recreational sports person. Over time, the recreational sport of choice will change.

This is often in response to the need to place less demands on their joints, and to limit episodes of pain and stiffness.

Keeping fit is of huge benefit to our health, and sensible exercise is a key component of good ageing.

Field sports involve an immense amount of multidirectional activity. Some sports involve significant contact and collision. With others, there is considerable jumping and landing. Over time, all of the above activities will lead to wearing of the cartilage of joint surfaces.

Sometimes players have to end their careers early due to a mixture of age and injury. This is very much the case with hip-joint injuries.

While the hip joint is for discussion today, I am not going to discuss associated injuries, such as the groin and hamstring. To start with, visualise the hip as a ball-and-socket joint, where the lower limb moves with the pelvis. The pelvis then moves with the spine. If the pelvis or spine become damaged, then hip function is compromised.

Conversely, if the hip is damaged, then the pelvis and lumbar spine often follow suit. It is rare that any of these three regions present alone in the over-45 age group.

The hip is a very durable and stable joint, supported with strong ligaments and muscles. It is where the femur meets the pelvis. During injury presentations, I often use slow-motion clips of matches, which is an amazing



/// PHYSIO ///  
**JOHN MURPHY**

spectacle, especially in AFL, Gaelic football, hurling and soccer, all of which show high-speed multidirectional movement.

Rugby is more linear, as is American football. Watching my native Cork win the recent Munster senior football final again brought home the amazing amount of twisting and turning

involved in such field sports.

By the time most players have retired from any field sport, their hips will be showing some signs of ageing.

Here are some interesting recent cases we have seen over the years.

Currently in clinic I have a 22-year-old Gaelic footballer who needs to retire from GAA due to ongoing hip-joint and hip-related injuries.

He presented initially 18 months ago, complaining of recurrent hamstring injuries. On examination, however, his hips did not allow the movement required to turn and twist at speed. X-rays and an MRI confirmed the damage to the joint.

The best course of action is to retire from field sports and continue with other activities which involve less impact. This is not an easy choice for a young player, but problems in the hips at an early age will only worsen by playing field sports for too long.

Last month, a 28-year-old hockey player came to us complaining of night pain in her hips when lying on her sides. Clinical examination clearly indicated damage to her hip joints, which was confirmed when her GP organised a scan to check the hips. She too needs to retire from the sport because night pain is one step closer to chronic hip pain.

In general, those who get constant hip pain need surgery for relief.

Our aim with this patient, in view of her young age, is to protect her own hips for as



long as possible with sensible conservative management.

Such sportspeople find early retirement hard to do. Longer-term wellbeing is often forgotten while playing, because athletes want to play and achieve their goals.

Two of Dublin's recent Gaelic football captains who I worked with suffered such fates. Colin Moran is 32 years old now, and has already had a Birmingham resurfacing surgery performed on his hip. This was due to the considerable pain he was experiencing. Now retired, and following two surgeries, he is able to do light running and cycling.

He would have kept playing if it was in any way possible. His first hip operation was to try and give him that opportunity.

The second captain is Coman Goggins, another fantastic character. He has had no hip operations but he has told me that he does get pain, and his aim is to try and keep his current hips for as long as possible. Both of them knew that their hips were in trouble and decided to



Didier Drogba shows how much strain the hips are under during a training session for Shanghai Shenhua



Sports such as AFL, Gaelic football, hurling and soccer, all need the body to make high-speed multidirectional hip movements

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try to keep going as long as they were able and competitive.

Playing field sports has an associated injury risk to the hips.

Playing too much at an early age is illogical. Children and young adults rarely complain of direct hip pain. This does not mean that the hip joints are not being damaged during those years. I firmly believe that a balanced approach needs to be taken regarding the number of training sessions and games that our young players are allowed to play.

**H**ow do you play these sports without moving the hip pendulum? How do you play without causing early wear to the hip joints? There is no perfect answer.

Participation in sport is a brilliant part of Irish life, and on balance should always be encouraged. One thing for certain is that you can damage these joints with inappropriate weights or excessive overloading in terms of incorrect training.

With proper management and good advice, even those who sustain damage to their joints, leading to early arthritis of the hips, knees or lower backs, can still become the runners of tomorrow and the cyclists of the future.

This is even more relevant when we consider that half the girls born in 2012 will live to be 100 years of age. A healthier Ireland in 50 years' time means looking after today's young field-sports players, to make sure that they remain active in the future.

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