

# *How to Reduce Secondary Injury / Being a Good Emergency Patient*

*A Sports Medicine Primer*

*By: R. Steven Rogers, E.M.T. & Greg T. Olson D.C., D.A.C.A.N.*



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### INTRODUCTION:

Today we address a problem with sports that many overlook, and is too often unaddressed - that of secondary injury. Many contact / collision sports participants suffer from aggravations to, or seriously further their injuries by not understanding some basic facts on injuries and first aid. So we are here to provide something we have not yet seen – first aid from the patient’s perspective. We hope to give sports participants the knowledge they need to decrease the chance of any injury becoming worse through their own actions, or inactions.

The nature of contact and collision sports is such that injury can be anticipated as an eventuality, so it is imperative that athletes be trained to minimize their injuries as much as reasonably possible, and to attempt to limit secondary injury when safe to do so.

When a traumatic injury occurs, we understand we are catching you at your worst and that human nature is to withdraw (run) from pain. This is a normal survival response, but the person who can help you most is yourself. Trying to remain as calm as possible, breathing as slowly and deeply as possible, minimizing movement if safe to remain where you are, and not moving at all if you may have head or neck injury (again, if safe to remain where you are), and the like can prevent further injury.

So here are some pointers:

### LISTEN TO THE PROFESSIONALS

It is common for people to think they are OK after an injury. The body undergoes a massive chemical dump that includes some of the most powerful chemicals we know, including endorphins (a powerful human morphine-like drug), adrenaline (the people lifting cars drug), cortisol (a stress hormone, and memory blocker), and more. People have had very serious injuries and not been aware due to these chemicals. You will likely be in a state of excitement, and will not have the best judgment, Let the folks trained in Emergency Medicine help you, and you will reduce further injury and by doing so increase recovery time. PLEASE resist the urge to “be tough”, this is a normal reaction, but your symptoms are likely masked, and you are not a good judge of anything regarding your situation. If you feel any pain or discomfort, it could be much more serious than it appears to you, and remember, you may not feel anything at all - even if you are seriously injured.

### REMAIN CALM

Remaining calm slows blood flow and reduces blood pressure, which will help minimize any bleeding. It will also help you to better communicate to the EMS responders any symptoms or problems you may have, decreasing your treatment and transport times. If your injuries are serious, this time is invaluable.

## **REMAIN STILL**

Many sports are impact sports, and have a risk of head and neck injury. If you feel dizzy, have trouble focusing, feel any pain in your head or neck, and if it is safe to do so, stay as still as possible until medical help arrives. If there is damage, movement can cause serious harm including paralysis or even death. It is also worth mentioning that many times when a patient is backboarded and transported it is precautionary in nature. A quick X-Ray or MRI and exam are cheap insurance in cases like this, so do not panic if EMS tells you they need to do this, as they cannot take chances with your safety, and neither should you.

## **BLOOD**

Many people overreact at the sight of blood, whether their own, or someone else's. Keep in mind, with blood, a little can look like a lot, so do not panic just because you see what looks like a lot. And even if your event does not have on staff medical, if you are in or near a metro area help is usually not that far away. You can use direct pressure to control your own bleeding, just clamp your hand over the area, and use a clean piece of cloth if available. Note: if you do not have gloves and medical training (including training in bloodborne pathogens), you assist others at your own risk.

## **SEPARATIONS / DISLOCATIONS**

These are fairly common in many sports, and can be VERY painful. Please resist the urge to "put it back yourself". Not performed properly, reduction (the medical term for putting it back in place) can cause further damage. Sometimes X-rays must be taken before treatment can begin. Please be patient, we know how much it hurts, and are doing all we can to help you.

## **BROKEN BONES**

Again, in many sports, this can happen. With some it is more frequent, and each sport has its common breaks. Learn what they are and why they happen to help avoid them. Once it happens, just follow the above rules. Remember that movement can further damage, and extend healing time. While breaks can be potentially serious the vast majority of the time they just hurt a lot. To learn more, just ask the medical staff involved in your particular sport.

## **THE SPOUSE / PARENT REACTION**

A common problem is family rushing to the scene. This benefits no one, as most are not medically trained and should not be on scene, and even if they are, no one emotionally involved should be involved in patient care. This only reduces the quality of care and distracts the EMS professionals. If you are 5-10 feet away, you can still provide emotional support without distracting the patient or EMS and also be nearby to provide permissions for treatment (in the case of minors or unconscious patients). We will seek the spouse / parent out whenever necessary, whether for permissions, or if there is any information they should be made aware. All we are asking is to be allowed to do our job as best we can, and a calm, controlled scene is in the best interests of ALL patients.

## **CONCLUSION**

As medical professionals who work in sports medicine, we have seen altogether too often the consequences of these issues, and hope to pass along our experiences to reduce or minimize unnecessary injury to all sports participants. And, as with anything medically related, if you feel you are not cared for properly, get a second opinion.