

How to Prevent and Treat Injuries with Nutrition

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Tennis is an amazing sport, no matter what age and stage of life we are at. Some of my best tennis partners are in their 70s and I admire the endurance and strength I see on the court from both new and seasoned players. But tennis comes with its fair share of challenges, and injuries are one of them. Inflammation of joints and ligaments leads to wear and tear over time, especially if we gloss over the pain and train through it. Most of us don't take the time to rest, and this leads us to have worsening injuries with time.

Like with everything else, prevention is key, so here are my top tips for injury prevention in sports like tennis, based on the scientific research available to date. There is a lot of information online, but much of it is not reliable, so as dietitians, we take the time to review the scientific publications available, and make recommendations based on what we know is closest to the truth.

Protein

Protein is very important for repair and regeneration of muscle and timing is everything. Rather than putting all the protein of the day into one meal, consider spreading out your protein intake to about 30 g per meal (breakfast, lunch, dinner). Make sure you have a recovery snack after a tennis game that includes about 7g of protein.

Collagen or Gelatin

Although the evidence on collagen and gelatine supplements is not consistent, many choose to take supplements to help lubricate their joints. I suggest using chicken stock that you make at home, using chicken bones, which will release collagen and gelatine as the stock cooks. Using leftover chicken bones and wings, and drumsticks in your homemade stock is also a great way to reduce food waste, and benefit from the natural ingredients therein.

Manganese

Manganese is associated with muscle ligament repair, and therefore using foods such as nuts, legumes, seeds, whole grains and leafy greens will help you meet your manganese needs. Again, I caution against supplements, as they provide very high doses of manganese which is not suitable for general health.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Reducing inflammation and adding omega-3 fatty acids go hand in hand. Whether you enjoy salmon, or flax meal, walnuts, edamame, or chia seeds, adding omega-3 fatty acids to your meals daily is a great way to keep your circulatory system healthy and inflammation to a minimum.

Vitamin D and Calcium

When working with clients, I notice that many are deficient in both calcium and vitamin D. Sometimes, these nutrients cannot be obtained through foods, so speaking to your family doctor about supplements may be a good idea. Calcium and vitamin D are helpful in bone health, and prevention of fractures that can occur during sports like tennis.