

Beware the dangers of 'overplay'

By FA Editorial - Friday, 27 March, 2009

'Overplay' can leave young players vulnerable to injury.

If you work with young players, it's vital you're aware of the dangers 'overplay' can cause, how to spot it and what to do about it.

You could be a coach, parent, teacher, league official – indeed anyone working on the development of young players. Whatever your role, it's your responsibility to look after the medical interests of the players in your care.

"So we're clear, 'overplay' describes the cause of injuries due to excessive overuse of specific parts of their body," says Alan Hodson, The FA's Head of Medical and Exercise Science.

"Young players are particularly vulnerable to 'overuse' injuries caused by overplay. Such injuries, which can involve certain bones or muscles/tendons, develop over time due to too much repetitive activity. They will continue unless correct medical advice and treatment is followed."

Young players are particularly vulnerable to 'overuse' injuries as their muscles and bones grow at different rates – particularly when they experience 'growth spurts'.

"Because football – in training and matches – involves strong, repetitive actions like running, jumping and landing, we need to be particularly vigilant," Alan notes.

The four main areas where 'overuse' injuries occur are the back, knee, shin and ankle/heel. Persistent aching, discomfort, tenderness and/or pain that won't go away without several hours/days rest is a warning sign – and remember, these aren't injuries you can 'run off'. They will get worse with continued activity.

These injuries will not be a result of a 'direct' impact, like a tackle, or twisted ankle – they will have developed over time, and will take time to cure.

"If you suspect a player in your care is suffering from an 'overuse' injury, your first port of call should be his/her family doctor, but keeping your eyes and ears open is vital, as problems can be minimised by early recognition and prompt action," Alan concludes.

The FA's Medical Working Group advises all those who work with young players to consider:

- The amount of training and matches a young player is asked to be involved in
- Ensuring a player's activities are partly aimed at success – and partly at sheer enjoyment
- Never dismissing signs and symptoms of 'overuse' injuries.