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VARY YOUR TRAINING INTENSITY TO AVOID INJURY AND ENHANCE PERFORMANCE

By Peter H. Edwards, Jr., M.D.

Overuse injuries are very common in all athletes, but especially among soccer players. Soccer combines both endurance and collision elements that predispose athletes to repetitive stress type injuries. These injuries happen as a result of an accumulation of small or micro injuries that athletes don't often notice when they occur. Over time, injuries worsen and symptoms develop.

Training patterns often influence the onset of overuse injuries. Hard training over several consecutive days is not recommended. To minimize the risk of overuse injury, athletes should remember the **24-hour recovery rule: intense training sessions should never occur within 24 hours of each other.** This equates to a **hard-easy-hard-easy pattern.** Coaches often can balance intense fitness training with tactical or skill work, allowing athletes adequate recovery after high levels of physical stress.

For well-conditioned athletes, progression of the 24-hour rule is usual. The pattern allows for vigorous training on a daily basis, as long as maximal intensity and maximal duration workouts do not occur on consecutive days. For example, an elite marathon runner may run seven to ten miles daily, but by varying the pace from five-minute to seven-minute miles, the workout's intensity still adheres to the hard-easy pattern.

When matches are added into the training equation, another variable must be considered. To optimize play, athletes should never engage in high intensity and duration training in the 24 hours before a match. Similarly, the day after a match, training should allow for muscular recovery. In peak play periods when multiple match weekend tournaments are the norm, adhering to the 24-hour recovery rule often is modified. However, recognizing athletes' need for recovery time is still **critical.**

As with all injury situations, early recognition and treatment of overuse injuries reduces time lost to play. Stiffness or pain that worsens over three to four days of training is significant. At first, ice and rest is recommended. If the condition does not improve, see your athletic trainer or a sports medicine orthopedist to prevent more serious problems.

Peter H. Edwards, Jr., M.D. is an orthopedic sports medicine specialist at the Ohio Orthopedic Center of Excellence in Columbus, Ohio. He specializes in lower extremity sports medicine with an emphasis on soccer injuries.