

HOW TO STAY

HIPS DON'T LIE: OUR CURVES MAY SET US UP TO GET HURT.



Injuries from high school sports can pop up in your 20s and beyond—but it doesn't have to mean you're sidelined forever.

BY ASHLEY ROSS



IN THE GAME

I WAS ONLY 23, but my hips belonged in an old age home. My left leg gave out when I stood up, running three miles left me limping, and having sex resulted in groans of pain, not moans of pleasure. I was diagnosed with a femoroacetabular impingement—the ball of my hip wasn't gliding smoothly in its socket, causing a sharp pain. Then an MRI found a stress fracture in my pelvis.

My injuries, doctors told me, were a result of years of athletics growing up. I'm like many women in their 20s and 30s who were raised on Mia Hamm and Kerri Strug. We played hard then, and we're paying for it now.

I am my worst self without a workout—restless, scatterbrained, sulky—but I took a break. Yet, no matter how long I rested or how much physical therapy I did, it still hurt. After two excruciating years, I decided to undergo surgery. Once I came to, I learned that the pain was connected to yet another issue: a tear in my labrum, the ring of cartilage around my hip socket.

I spent the next few months in rehab. Now, two years later, I play in a flag-football league, regularly run five miles, and dance all night in heels. Recovery wasn't easy; it was made harder by snickers and insults from people who heard I had hip surgery at 25, calling me Grandma and scoffing at complaints they assumed were overblown.

In fact, labral tears like mine more commonly affect women, perhaps because the bones of our hip joints are more likely to be misaligned. And

stress fractures occur more often in girls than boys, and particularly in girls with low BMI, late menstruation, or experience in gymnastics and dance. Ditto ACL tears. Certain movements—landing, pivoting, cutting—can be harder on a woman's body. We're built differently. Typically, a woman's pelvis is wider and shallower, the space between her knees more narrow. "Wider hips mean wider angles," says David Jou, the physical therapist who treated me. "There's more room for error."

Injuries from adolescence, even simple ones like sprained ankles, can cause problems later on. Many who suffer sprains develop chronic ankle instability. The pain causes them to move less in general, which can potentially be a "substantial health risk," according to a 2015 study conducted at UNC at Charlotte, since inactivity is associated with the development of chronic diseases.

My injury was never tied to a specific fall in soccer, rough landing in gymnastics, or quick cut in basketball, all sports I played from toddlerhood through high school. But my doctor, William Long, MD, an orthopedic surgeon in New York, believes the damage could be linked to my aggressive athleticism. "Wear and tear creates problems later," he says. "You have only one set of cartilage."

Women and men often react to injuries differently, says Jonathan Fader, PhD, a sports psychologist. Some of it can be blamed on gender stereotypes in sports. "In my experience, women act tougher and don't listen to their bodies so as not to be a 'weak woman,'" he says. Dr. Long agrees, saying that he sees women put off addressing injuries more than men do. But they need to be taken care of now so they don't crop up again later.

Lindsey Williams hurt her hip playing basketball in high school. She hit the court with a vengeance after treatment—eventually landing on the Yale team—but continued to suffer a cascade of injuries. At 19, her doctor said she had the knees of a 45-year-old. She quit hoops. "It was the hardest thing, but the best decision for my body," says Williams, now 27. "I can work out pretty consistently, although I'm the dork in two knee braces."

NONE OF THIS is to say that teenage girls should stop playing sports or that former female athletes—collegiate or recreational—should forgo fitness in their 20s. In fact, it's likely in their best interest to hit the gym regularly...as long as they choose activities wisely and listen to their bodies.

Jordyn Wieber won Olympic gold in gymnastics in 2012 with a stress fracture in her shin (thanks, adrenaline). Today, Wieber has a better grasp on the importance of self-care. "When an injury rears, I know right away to ice or rehab it to make sure I can still do the types of workouts I want to do, like SoulCycle and 10Ks," she says.

Alternating between workouts that are high-impact (running, dance) and low-impact (cycling,

swimming) and rest days can help ensure you aren't sidelined. And you might want to head to an Ab Lab class: "If there's an injury in a limb, chances are, there's an imbalance in the core," says Jou.

To find imbalances, Jenn Seracuse, trainer to models like Alessandra Ambrosio, suggests these two tests: Get on all fours, then lift one arm and the opposite leg and see how wobbly you are; repeat on the other side. You'll likely notice a difference. Second, squat deep, keeping your chest up. Knees falling in or out, weight shifting to one side, heels lifting up, and the pelvis tipping forward are all signs something could be off.

"Do more single-sided exercises," Seracuse suggests. "Start on your weaker side. Do as many reps

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THE SAME MOVEMENTS—PIVOTS, CUTS—CAN HIT A WOMAN HARDER THAN THEY DO A MAN.

of the exercise—say, lunges—as you can with good form, then mimic that on the stronger side."

Imbalances can be exacerbated by a sedentary lifestyle. Sitting dormant at a desk, then going into a tough workout cold can be a recipe for injury. Even if it's barre instead of basketball or a jog and not track practice, the body needs adequate prep and recovery. Says Jou, "Every time you exercise, spend 10 to 15 minutes before or after for warm-up, cooldown, and stretching." And try to avoid staying still all day. "Set a timer at work to change positions, stand up, or take a walk. Do quad and hip-flexor stretches while watching TV."

It's not that women are going too hard, Jou says, or that the potential for injury is an excuse to avoid activity. Work out as hard or as easily as you like, just have the right mind-set: "Prepare more. Work hard, play hard, recover harder." ■

FROM LEFT: GALLERY STOCK; GETTY IMAGES.