

# Newsletter

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## **WHIP program targets young soccer players**

By Evelyn Tobler, The Arthritis Society

The Arthritis Society (TAS) recently launched the WHIP (Warm-up Helps Injury Prevention) program directed in its first phase at young soccer players between eight and thirteen. A colourful brochure and exercise demonstrations have been developed to market WHIP. The brochure contains information and tips for parents, coaches and the players themselves. The program includes strengthening and conditioning exercises. The 15-minute soccer-specific exercise routine consists of warm-up, stretching, strengthening and agility exercises. It ends with a cool-down routine.

The exercises in WHIP were adapted from a program developed for female athletes by the Santa Monica Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Research Foundation. They're designed to reduce or prevent injuries and joint damage in young people that can lead to osteoarthritis (OA). Studies show that a knee joint injury at age 22 triples the likelihood of developing OA by a person's mid-40s.

### **Young players don't often think about injuries**

Injuries to the lower extremities are most common in impact sports that use the lower body, such as soccer, basketball and hockey. The aim of WHIP is to help prevent these injuries in young people by building up their muscular strength and co-ordination. Later, WHIP plans to target kids who play in other sports, like hockey, basketball and gymnastics.

Lauren Ibaraki, 13, has been playing soccer with the Gordon Head Soccer Club since she was 6 years old. In that time, she's had several coaches and has done different levels of exercise. Lauren is also active in other sports, like volleyball. She's had an ankle fracture, plus a wrist fracture and several sprains. She is probably typical of most kids when it comes to thinking about osteoarthritis.

Asked if she's ever thought about how an injury could affect her when she's older, Lauren says: "Not really" even though she already has recurring knee pain.

### **Prevention comes through education**

Margaret Purdy is a physiotherapist at the Arthritis Centre, whose children Julia, Michael and Tom have all played or are playing soccer. "I see many people with osteoarthritis," she said. "I see how it impacts their lives, so I realize how important it is to try to prevent it. The WHIP program has the potential to educate the public that these kids can sustain injuries and that that can have consequences. The WHIP brochure is a good tool for coaches, but for parents and the public as well, in educating people about the importance of conditioning and strengthening exercises. Public education is important." She adds: "Eight to 13 is a good age to work with kids, because if they're younger, they may not have the maturity to realize the importance of what we're talking about. If they learn to do exercises, that will stick with them and I think that's doing a great service for these kids. Technique is important, especially with the stretches. Even if kids don't stick with soccer, they'll have this knowledge to take with them into other sports."

### **Coaches recognize the importance of WHIP**

Ray Farmer has been coaching his daughter Elizabeth's U11 team at the Gorge Soccer Club for three years. Although he hasn't seen many injuries, he's aware of the importance of warm-ups and stretching

exercises. "Programs like this are a good thing," says Ray. "They educate people at a young age."

Colin Roberts, principal at Richmond Elementary School, currently coaches a U14 girl's team at Gordon Head Soccer Club. He has been coaching sports for about 18 years. "There seems to be a greater incidence of knee injuries among younger people than when I started to coach," he said. "I wasn't aware of so many young people getting injured. Now it's not uncommon to hear of it, primarily knee injuries. The reason may be because there are more kids in sports at an earlier age. I think that may be because we have become more competitive and we're starting kids in sports earlier. We're probably demanding more of them physically earlier." Colin thinks it's always useful for coaches to get reminders about exercising. He says that ideas on how to adapt the warm-ups and stretching routines are helpful, too, so coaches keep up-to-date on appropriate techniques. "I think that, as coaches, we can play an important role in helping young people avoid injuries," he said.

Seeing the WHIP promotion and exercise demonstrations may motivate young soccer players to want to do the exercises. "If the players themselves saw an external group promotion, that may reinforce what the coaches say," said Colin. "Maybe it would heighten the importance of those things in their minds if there's a group of outside people, like The Arthritis society, who have nothing to do with the coach or the club, saying that this is important and kids should do it."

The Arthritis Society (TAS) would like to see the WHIP program incorporated into the coaches' standard exercise routine for their weekly training sessions. If you'd like to help, TAS and the Victoria Community Group are looking for volunteers to help with promotion and demonstrations. If you're interested, call WHIP Coordinator, June Painter, at the TAS office in Victoria:598-2278