

Western Pennsylvania Guide to Good Health

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It Pays to be Prepared When Planning to Play Sports

By John Fries

Weekend warriors--countless men and women in their 30's, 40's and beyond who spend their workdays in sedentary situations--are everywhere. They work hard, but their jobs often don't provide much physical activity--so we find them sitting behind desks, working behind retail store counters or spending a lot of time behind the wheel. Maybe you're a warrior who looks forward each week to that Tuesday night basketball game or Saturday mountain biking session. No matter what your athletic pastime, John Gibbons, M.D. has some important advice. "Prepare for it," he says. "Taking the time to warm up and cool down can often help you prevent problems and injuries."

The orthopedic surgeon, a member of Southwestern Pennsylvania Orthopedic Associates, walks the talk. A Massachusetts native who moved to the Pittsburgh area in 2002, he's a lifelong athlete who played football at Harvard, where he attended college. Today, he plays in a weekly basketball game.

Although Gibbons' niche specialties are sports medicine and joint replacement surgery, the patients he treats come in all ages and sizes, and bring a variety of problems. "In my practice," he says, "I see a lot of athletic injuries. Many of the guys I play basketball with come into the office as patients. Also, a lot of young women who play high school basketball come in with ACL tears."

Gibbons says your body changes as you age. "I realized after I turned 40 that it took me longer to recover from strenuous activity," he says. For this reason, he recommends that all athletes prepare thoroughly for physical activity. "It's important to exercise regularly," he says. "Before playing a sport, take the time to stretch. Warm up your Achilles heel, tendons, knees, hamstrings, quads and back. Also, stay well hydrated during activity--especially as you get older."

Gibbons says he views physical activity as falling into in three specific categories. "There the activity you have to do, like working. There's activity you do for conditioning. Then, there's the activity you do to enhance your quality of life." He says this type can include running or jogging, playing basketball or tennis, swimming or indoor activities like using an elliptical machine.

An Upper St. Clair resident who holds an MD from Columbia University School of Medicine (where he met his wife, a native of Upper St. Clair who was studying plastic surgery), Gibbons spent time at Columbia/Presbyterian Hospital in New York and at Dartmouth University before relocating to Pittsburgh. He's glad to see people taking a more active interest in proper athletic training. "Scholastic coaches are starting to become more aware of minimizing injuries, and that's a good thing," he says.

John Fries

2637 Brighton Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15212

Phone: 412-760-2299 • E-Mail: johnfries@comcast.net • Web: www.johnfries.com

