

Athletic Trainer Services



Coaches' Education Handout

subluxation vs. dislocation

The terms dislocation and subluxation refer to the displacement of bones that form a joint. These conditions affecting the joint most often result from trauma that causes adjoining bones to no longer align with each other. A partial or incomplete dislocation is called a subluxation. In the event of a dislocation, one of the bones making up the joint is forced out of its natural alignment from excessive stretching and tearing of the joint ligaments and capsule. Muscles and tendons surrounding the joint are also usually stretched and injured to some degree. The most common dislocations and subluxations in sports occur at the shoulder, elbow, fingers, and knee

Signs & Symptoms

- Pain is usually severe, even upon the slightest of movement.
- Swelling and significant hemorrhaging occurs around the joint.
- Obvious deformity. A visible deformity is usually present, although this may not be the case with a subluxation. The athlete, however, will usually report that the joint “went out of place”.

On-Site Management

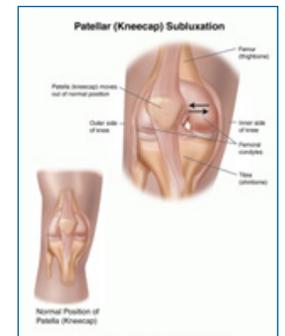
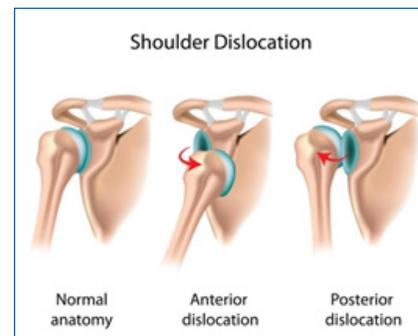
- Protect the dislocated/subluxed joint (i.e. splint) from further injury.
- Apply ice to help reduce swelling and pain.
- Immobilize the Joint. Usually the athlete will support the affected limb in the position of most comfort. Try to support this position in any way possible and transport the athlete to a medical facility as soon as possible.
- Medical Referral-Do NOT Attempt to Relocate. Regardless of the temptation to help an athlete, never attempt to relocate a dislocation. Physician referral is mandatory. Subluxations must also be examined by a physician as bone and ligament damage is almost always associated with these injuries.

Return to Activity:

- Once a dislocation has been reduced, and a subluxation has been determined to be stable, an athlete will require time to heal and rehabilitation.

Prevention:

- Vulnerable fingers (for example) can be taped prior to practice and competitions.
- Proper strengthening of muscles surrounding the joints (i.e. shoulder girdle) will help prevent shoulder subluxations/dislocations.
- For chronic subluxation or dislocation, a brace or special tape application can help to reduce the likelihood of this from occurring.



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