

New injury prevention exercise programme will dramatically reduce injuries in rugby



A new dynamic 20-minute exercise programme, that is performed by rugby players before training and pre-match, could dramatically reduce injuries in the sport according to a benchmark study published today (Sunday 22 October).

Published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, the collaborative project between health researchers at the University of Bath and England Rugby shows that the introduction of a simple injury prevention exercise programme has significant impacts in reducing rates both for concussion and lower limb injuries.

By following the progress of 81 men's adult community rugby club teams and nearly 2,000 players over the course of one season, its findings shows significant reductions in concussion and lower-limb injuries as a result of the new exercise control programme.

Its results highlight concussion injuries reduced by up to 60% with lower-limb injuries reduced by up to 40%. The greater the compliance among players, the greater the impacts in terms of injury reduction – the best results were observed where teams practised the warm-up at least twice a week.

'Activate', the new training and pre-match exercise programme, was developed by the research team as part of the study and builds on research earlier in the year focused on schoolboy rugby showing similarly impressive results.

The Activate warm-up regime focuses on balance, strength and agility in order to better prepare players for the physical challenges they face in matches and to mitigate potential injury risks. Split into four stages it takes roughly 20 minutes to complete.

The new protocol is made up of a combination of exercises that develop overall fitness, strength, power and stability. The exercises are specifically targeted to improve functional and core strength, particularly

lower limb balance and functional neck strength, all of which assist a player in dealing with the physical demands of the game (www.englandrugby.com/activate).

One of the study authors, Dr Simon Roberts from the University of Bath's Department for Health explained: "By replacing stretching exercises that players typically do before training and matches with exercises that focus on better control of movement, we have seen a dramatic reduction in injuries in this study.

"This new programme is markedly different from the kind of warm-up players might typically take part in during training or pre-match with a much greater focus on movement control. Combining the impressive results on injury reduction with the national roll-out of this programme with England Rugby, we are particularly excited by the potential for this work in making a long-term impact on the game."

Professor Keith Stokes, Head of the University of Bath's Department for Health who lead the work said: "The injury that has received the greatest focus in recent years has been concussion. At present we are not clear about the precise mechanisms by which the programme reduces concussion incidence, but this is a particularly interesting finding."

The Activate Injury Prevention Exercise is a key element of England Rugby's 'Rugby Safe' programme, their overarching player welfare awareness initiative.

Steve Grainger, RFU Rugby Development Director, said: "This is a really exciting opportunity for us to improve player safety and reduce injuries across game. Since launching the Activate programme at the beginning of September we've already seen hundreds of coaches sign up to access the online resources and complete the face to face training."

"Having this strong evidence behind the programme we hope that coaches appreciate the importance of it and integrate the exercises into their training and pre-match routines to ensure their players are in the best position possible when taking to the field."