

# Safety tips for holiday football games

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Don't let injuries sideline you during Thanksgiving pick-up games.

(HealthDay)—Pick-up football games are a Thanksgiving tradition for many people, but they can lead to injuries if you're not careful, an expert says.

"Playing in a Turkey Bowl is a great way to get some exercise and burn off those pumpkin pie calories," Dr. Pietro Tonino, program director of [sports medicine](#) at the Loyola University School of Medicine, said in a university news release. "But make sure you play smart to stay safe."

Tonino, who also is a professor in Loyola's orthopedic surgery and rehabilitation department, offered the following tips to reduce the risk of injury:

- Don't tackle. Play touch or flag football instead.

- Warm up by jogging, running in place or doing jumping jacks for a few minutes before the game. Then slowly and gently stretch, holding each stretch for 30 seconds.
- Don't wear cleats. There's a risk that they'll cause your foot to be stuck in one position while the rest of your body is moving in a different direction, resulting in an injury. Wear gym shoes instead.
- Wear a mouth guard. They cost just a few dollars and can save hundreds of dollars in dental bills.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes, such as sweats. This will make it easier for your body to move and reduce your injury risk.
- Remember your age. If you're 40, don't try to play like you're still 20.
- Don't drink alcohol before or during your Turkey Bowl.
- If you get hurt, stay on the sidelines until symptoms go away completely. Before returning to the game, make sure you have no pain or swelling and have normal strength and a full range of motion.
- When the game is over, remember to stretch. This will help reduce [muscle soreness](#) the next day.

**More information:** The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more [holiday health and safety tips](#).

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