

As the pickleball craze grows, doctors urge players not to ignore injuries

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Luis Gandara, MD, examines a patient at The Orlando Health Jewett Orthopedic Institute who suffered an injury while playing the increasingly popular sport of pickleball. While he encourages patients to participate in active hobbies they enjoy, he stresses the importance of seeking care for nagging aches and pains to prevent injuries from worsening. Credit: Orlando Health

Pickleball is the fastest growing sport in the country and has proven to be a great way to help millions stay active. And while it may seem like a fun game with a silly name, like any sport, it is not without risk. As doctors see more patients with pickleball-related injuries, a new national survey by The Harris Poll on behalf of Orlando Health finds many Americans are likely to forgo medical care for a nagging sports injury.

"Because pickleball is a relatively low impact activity, a lot of people think they won't get hurt, but we're seeing more and more people coming in with everything from [broken bones](#) and sprains to overuse injuries to the knees, shoulders and elbows," said Luis Gandara, MD, a sports medicine physician at the Orlando Health Jewett Orthopedic Institute. "Any injury that doesn't seem to be getting better in a matter of a few days needs to be checked out by an orthopedic specialist to get a correct diagnosis and effective treatment."

The survey found that while a third (33%) of Americans report avoiding participation in a sport or hobby because of a nagging injury, about half (49%) agree it's not worth seeing a doctor for a [sports injury](#) they believe will heal on its own, something Gandara warns can exacerbate injuries and lead to more serious problems that are more difficult to treat.

"Playing through an injury that doesn't resolve with rest, ice and elevation causes that injury to become increasingly unstable," he said. "If a patient comes to us right away, there is a good chance we can treat them with less-invasive options to help common injuries like a strained ligament, torn muscle or a hairline fracture heal. But if an injury is left to worsen over time without intervention, a patient is more likely to require surgery and a longer and more difficult recovery."

The survey also found 44% believe making a doctor's appointment for an injury that is not too painful is too much work. That's why the Jewett Orthopedic Institute opened several walk-in clinics, where [patients](#) can

see an orthopedic specialist without an appointment or a referral, to ensure patients can get the care they need quickly and conveniently.

"Unlike going to the ER or an urgent care center, an orthopedic walk-in clinic is staffed with specialists who can assess sports injuries and immediately initiate effective treatment, whether that involves [physical therapy](#) and non-invasive treatments like injections or a same day referral to a specific type of surgeon," Gandara said.

Robbin Murray fell in love with pickleball a decade ago. But as she played more frequently and competitively, she began to have issues with her knee that were painful enough to keep her off the court.

"I was hooked right from the start and would play as much as I could, all day long, eventually traveling to compete in senior tournaments," Murray said. "It all added up and I started experiencing sharp pains that would take me down to the ground in the middle of a game."



Pickleball is a great way to stay active, but like any sport, it comes with risks. A new national survey by Orlando Health finds many Americans are likely to forgo treatment for nagging sports injuries, something doctors warn can lead to more serious conditions and complicated treatments. Credit: Orlando Health

Robbin worried she would need knee replacement surgery, but after consulting with Dr. Gandara, has been able to safely participate in the sport she loves and manage her [injury](#) with a specialized brace, anti-inflammatory injections and physical therapy to strengthen and stretch the area.

Gandara encourages people to get out and enjoy pickleball or any healthy activity they enjoy, but emphasizes the importance of easing into any new activity, taking precautions like stretching and wearing

supportive shoes and listening to your body when something doesn't feel right.

Survey method

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Orlando Health from June 15—20, 2023 among 2,076 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within +/- 2.7 percentage points using a 95% confidence level.

Provided by Orlando Health

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