

Play in youth, pay in old age, healthwise

Playing tennis or badminton might be an excellent way of keeping fit, but if you're not careful, you may end up paying in old age, healthwise.

A new study headed by Navah Ratzon, director of occupational therapy department at Tel Aviv University (TAU), can be applied to any number of leisure sport activities.

'Increasing numbers of adults are pursuing amateur athletics during their leisure hours. But we've found worrying indications that this activity -- when not done properly -- may have negative effects on the musculoskeletal system,' Ratzon warned.

For example, in the US, musculoskeletal disorders and disease are the leading cause of disability, and are the cause of chronic conditions in 50 percent of all people 50 years and older.

Musculoskeletal complaints include discomfort, pain or disease of the muscles, joints or soft tissues connecting the bones.

Focusing specifically on bowlers, Ratzon and her graduate student Nurit Mizrahi found that 62 percent of the 98 athletes in their study reported musculoskeletal problems -- aches and pains in the back, fingers, and wrist, for example.

According to the study, the degree of pain a player reported was in direct proportion to the number of leagues in which the person participated. Their conclusion is that the intensity of the sport exacerbated the risk of long-term musculoskeletal damage.

The risks are particularly high in sports where the body is held asymmetrically and repetitive movements are made, according to a TAU release. These findings were recently published in the journal *Work*.

All ball sports should be played with caution, Ratzon advised, including sports like golf, basketball, tennis and squash. 'Your body is meant to work in a certain way,' she added.

'If you jump for the tennis ball while twisting your back, you put too much stress on your body because it's an unnatural movement.'

Stretching before games is an obvious prevention method against long-term damage. But people should take other measures to keep their bodies fit.

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