



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363  
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2266  
<https://safety.army.mil>

## Off-duty injuries sideline Soldiers

**ART POWELL**  
Strategic Communication Directorate  
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center  
Fort Rucker, Ala.

Quick: Which of these activities injured more Soldiers in 2011: weapons firing, parachuting or off-duty sports?

If you picked sports, you'd be correct. Army accident data show that snowboarding and skiing produce the most injuries of all off-duty sports activities, followed closely by touch football.

The game was born during World War II, according to [footballbabble.com](http://footballbabble.com), a blog for football enthusiasts.

"As America prepared to enter World War II, troops stationed at military bases needed a way to blow off steam. Since playing traditional football might result in injuries, flag football was developed as a compromise," the site states. "While Webster's dictionary does not have the term 'flag football' listed until 1954, the game is believed to have started in the 1940s with Fort Meade, Md., as its generally accepted birthplace."

Players, regardless of age, need to warm up and be prepared for any physical activity, including touch or flag football. Just because it isn't a full contact sport doesn't mean it's injury free.

The Armed Forces Flag Football League refers to a recent study that supports other statistics on the hazards of the game:

"Flag football has long been very popular in the armed forces of the United States, with the Air Force even completing a 10-year descriptive study of flag football injuries from 1993-2002. They (Air Force) found that the leading cause of injury was due to contact with another player, which caused 42 percent of their reported injuries. The second leading group of issues included slips, trips and falls, resulting simply from the act of running during the game."

Dr. Brian C. Halpern, associate attending physician and clinical associate professor in medicine, Hospital for Special Surgery and Weill Cornell Medical College, New York, said preparing for the activity is a "primary goal."

"The different injury types are numerous, and prevention should be a primary goal. Begin a preseason conditioning program that includes stretching, strengthening and cardiovascular conditioning," he said. "Other more specific measures, as outlined in the Air Force study, include implementing and enforcing rules to minimize contact, training to improve balance, improving the playing field conditions, and, if necessary, protecting previously injured areas with bracing.

"At the end of the day, flag football should be fun, and participation is the best reward."