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New Study Released on the Effects of Surfing on the Spine and Quality of Life

A recent study into the injuries and risks associated with competitive surfing found the lower back was the most commonly injured area by surfers. Surfers also recorded a higher state of physical and mental quality of life compared to the average Australian.

The study, 'An Australian survey on health and injuries in adult competitive surfing', found that 81% of those surveyed incurred at least one surfing-related injury in their lifetime, while 58% have experienced a surfing-related injury within the current surfing season.

Three chiropractors, Drs Andrew Burgess, Michael Swain and Reidar Lystad conducted the research with the support of Surfing NSW. They studied the injury profile of adult competitive surfers at the 2014 Australian Surfing Titles by examining surfing injuries in relation to the type of surfboard used.

“The previous research that was published didn’t clarify who was participating in their studies based on surf craft use. This led us to separate the surf codes and determine whether there were any differences or similarities between their injury profiles,” Dr Burgess said.

Differentiating the injury profile of short board, long board and body board riders, it was discovered that short boarders have a higher frequency of knee injuries compared to long boarders, with 29% of short boarders incurring injuries, compared to 9%.

The study also showed that Australian adult competitive surfers had a higher quality of mental and physical health than the average Australian. These encouraging results support current surf research and programs which have indicated surfing helps with mental health and wellbeing. Surfers were also highly active surfing ten hours per week and continuing to compete into their seventies. They also maintained well balanced diets and consumed alcohol at a lower risk level than the average Australian.

With the lower back as a main area of injury amongst surfers and 2.7 million Australians participating within the sport, the information can be passed on to advise recreational and competitive surfers to see a chiropractor for help with managing and preventing these injuries as well as ways to improve their overall health and wellbeing.

“Due to the high surfing participation rates in Australia, chiropractors would be exposed to a number of surfers in their office who they can share this information with and encourage others to receive the same health benefits from activate participation in the sport.”

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