

Football

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see [American football](#).

Football is one of the very few [sports](#) where the [head](#) is purposefully used as an integral requirement of the game, with the skill of heading taught from a young playing age.

Given the scientific and public concern regarding the short-, medium- and long-term consequences of heading on brain health, being proactive about developing and implementing guidelines that help reduce the burden (volume, impact magnitude and injury risk) of heading in young and beginner players appears justified. This narrative review explores the evidence-underpinning strategies that could be incorporated into future heading guidelines to reduce heading burden in players across all levels of football. A four-step search strategy was utilized to identify all data-based papers related to heading in football. Eligibility criteria for inclusion were: (1) original data, (2) study population included football players, (3) outcome measures included one or more of the following: number of headers, measurement of head acceleration during heading, or head/brain injury incidence, and (4) published in English or English translation available. In total, 58 papers were included that outlined strategies based on (1) game or team development, (2) player skill development and (3) equipment. In particular, greater emphasis existed for small-sided games (particularly in young players) where fewer headers are observed when compared with the conventional 11 versus 11 game, as well as reducing headers from goal kicks and corners. Evidence also existed for developing a heading coaching framework that focusses on technical proficiency as well as neuromuscular neck exercises integrated into general injury reduction exercise programs, enforcement of rules related to deliberate head contact and using lower-pressure match and training balls. To mitigate potential risks of heading on brain health, a number of pragmatic strategies have been examined in scientific studies and may be considered as part of future heading guidelines ¹⁾.

¹⁾

Peek K, Duffield R, Cairns R, Jones M, Meyer T, McCall A, Oxenham V. Where are We Headed? Evidence to Inform Future Football Heading Guidelines. Sports Med. 2023 Jul;53(7):1335-1358. doi: 10.1007/s40279-023-01852-x. Epub 2023 Jun 7. PMID: 37285067; PMCID: PMC10289964.

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