

More and more professional hockey players are using Pilates to prevent groin injuries. Here are the reasons why.

1. We have weak feet: Due to the stiff hockey skates we wear, there is no need for our feet to be strong. However, without strong feet we do not have a proper balance point. This in turn makes everything unbalanced from the bottom up. I found this evident when I first tried speed skates. With no support I really felt that I was going to break my ankles! I did one loop and that was that!

2. We have a weaker lower core: We have weak stabilizing muscles near the pelvis area. This is almost like comparing our body to a car that has a loose wheel. If one wheel is loose then the others can't do their job. If the core is not doing its job, other parts will over work, like our hip flexors, or groin.

3. We lack flexibility: The reason why more players have started taking up Pilates and yoga is because they realize the need to have more balance when it comes to overall strength and flexibility. Stretching is like giving the joints WD40 so they are free to move. One side might not have the same range as the other, but balancing this out is the key. When the leg goes out in a hockey stride, it might not move as freely as it should or it will with strain due to lack of flexibility. Over time, this general hockey movement becomes strenuous because the leg doesn't come back to the centre of the body. This causes an imbalance just from skating and adds more load to different areas, like the groin. In order to optimize power, an athlete not only needs to build strength by lifting weights, but they need to have a better balance between strength and flexibility

4. Our quads are too strong: Every motion we do is based on quad strength. However, there needs to be a balance. All the anterior leg muscles (i.e. quad, hip flexors) tend to be stronger than the posterior muscles (hamstring, glutes) causing a very big imbalance.

Balance between strength, flexibility and stability

We can also look at other factors that impact why hockey players get groin injuries - the poor

quality of ice or the increased stiffness that hockey skates are made with year after year - but in essence, I think there's often too much emphasis on building strength and power and not enough on flexibility. Is it the chicken before the egg or the egg before the chicken? Each athlete has to find balance between strength, flexibility and stability when training. Pilates responds to imbalances by strengthening all areas of the core, developing one's flexibility, and strengthening the posterior leg muscles (hamstrings, glutes).