

SPORTS INJURIES IN CHILDREN

More American children are competing in sports than ever before. Sports help children and adolescents keep their bodies fit and feel good about

themselves. However, there are some important injury prevention tips that can help parents promote a safe, optimal sports experience for their child.

Injury Risks

All sports have a risk of injury. In general, the more contact in a sport, the greater the risk of a traumatic injury. However, most injuries in young

athletes are due to overuse. Most frequent sports injuries are sprains (injuries to ligaments) and strains (injuries to muscles), and stress fractures

(injury to bone) caused when an abnormal stress is placed on tendons, joints, bones, and muscle. In a growing child, point tenderness over a bone should

be evaluated further by a medical provider even if there is minimal swelling or limitation in motion. Contact your pediatrician if you have

additional questions or concerns.

To Reduce the Risk of Injury:

- Time off. Plan to have at least 1 day off per week from a particular sport to allow the body to recover.

- Wear the right gear. Players should wear appropriate and properly fit protective equipment such as pads (neck, shoulder, elbow, chest, knee, shin),

helmets, mouthpieces, face guards, protective cups, and/or eye-wear. Young athletes should not assume that protective gear will protect them from

performing more dangerous or risky activities.

- Strengthen muscles. Conditioning exercises during practice strengthens muscles used in play.

- Increase flexibility. Stretching exercises before and after games or practice can increase flexibility. Stretching should also be incorporated

into a daily fitness plan.

- Use the proper technique. This should be reinforced during the playing season.

- Take breaks. Rest periods during practice and games can reduce injuries and prevent heat illness.

- Play safe. Strict rules against headfirst sliding (baseball and softball), and spearing (football) should be enforced.

- Stop the activity if there is pain.

- Avoid heat injury by drinking plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise or play; decrease or stop practices or competitions during

high heat/humidity periods; wear light clothing.

Sports-Related Emotional Stress

The pressure to win can cause significant emotional stress for a child. Sadly, many coaches and parents consider winning the most important

aspect of sports. Young athletes should be judged on effort, sportsmanship and hard work. They should be rewarded for trying hard and for

improving their skills rather than punished or criticized for losing a game or competition. The main goal should be to have fun and learn lifelong

physical activity skills.

After a sports injury, when to see the doctor

A safe and speedy return to activity following a sports injury or an illness depends on early recognition and treatment. Knowing when to see your

doctor is an important step in this process. With major injuries or illnesses, there is little doubt about the need to seek medical attention. However,

it is much more difficult to know when to seek help if there is no obvious trauma or if the symptoms don't get in the way of playing. Many overuse

injuries, such as tendonitis or stress fractures, happen over time and often have subtle symptoms. The result can be a delay in diagnosis and treatment,

and delays can lead to a more serious or disabling injury.

General comments

Athletes should see a doctor for:

- Symptoms that do not go away after rest and home treatment
- Any condition that affects training or performance that has not been given a diagnosis or has not been treated
- Any condition that may be a risk to other teammates or competitors