

Young athlete's injury prevention guide

Playing sports helps children and adolescents in many ways. It helps them:

- Stay fit
- Learn about teamwork
- Develop self-confidence

The number of kids playing sports is growing. The rate of injuries is also increasing. Children 5 to 14 years old have nearly 40% of all sports-related injuries treated in hospitals. On average, the rate and severity of injury goes up with a child's age. It is often thought that the earlier and harder you start training a child in a sport, the more likely he or she is to succeed. This is not true.

How can injuries be prevented?

The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests children wait until age 6 before playing team sports. Here are some ways to prevent sports injuries:

1. Get a sport physical

Get a yearly physical from your doctor. These exams help you know if it's okay to start sports.

2. Know your coaches

- Find out about their training.
- Make sure they stay current.
- Learn how they fit safety gear.
- Make sure the coach is cleared to work with children.

Coaches should:

- Know their athletes—workouts and goals should be specific to each athlete's abilities.
- Check playing area prior to practice or games.
- Be rested and alert.

3. Check for well-fitted safety gear

Make sure that young athletes have correctly fitted safety gear. The coach should teach the athlete how to wear and check safety gear. Shoes are an important part of safety gear. Shoes should fit securely. Wear sports-specific shoes.

4. Know the fastest way to get medical care

- Make sure coaches, athletes and other adults know how to quickly access medical care.
- Have an emergency plan in place.
- Practice the plan.
- Learn to give basic first aid.

5. Follow a warm-up and cool-down program

It is important to warm up. This helps the body get ready to handle the bursts of energy the sport needs. A basic warm-up should take 15 to 25 minutes.

- Start with 5 minutes of light aerobic activity. This helps raise the heart rate and warms up muscles.
- Do 10 minutes of dynamic stretches. Stretch your arms, legs and back.
- Work for 5 minutes on full-speed sprinting and jumping in different directions.
- Finish with 5 minutes of sport-specific drills.

At the end of practice or games:

- Spend time stretching your whole body.



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6. Have a good training program

Athletes need a pre-season plan to help get their bodies ready for play. Start the program at least 6-8 weeks before the season starts. Pre-season plans include:

- Flexibility
- Strength
- Balance and coordination
- Endurance
- Agility

When athletes don't exercise for a while, they aren't ready to play. One can't expect to go from being a 'couch potato' to playing high-level sports. Athletes will get hurt without a good training program.

7. Learn the correct skills

Master the skills of the sport. Overuse injuries are caused by doing something wrong over and over again. First learn skills with good form. Then focus on power and speed.

8. Take rest breaks

Rest often during practices and games. This reduces injury risk. Younger athletes need more rest breaks than older athletes. The greater the intensity of the sport, the more rest needed. Drink plenty of water before, during and after practice or games.

9. Know the signs of overtraining

Overtraining occurs when an athlete does the same skills over and over. They become physically or mentally exhausted. Signs of overtraining include:

- Lost desire to play
- Tiring quickly
- Resisting working with coaches and teammates
- Not reaching training goals
- Playing poorly
- Becoming slower in distance sports

Age-specific training guidelines:

3-4 years	2 times a week	30-45 min (with games)
5-7 years	2 to 3 times a week	45-60 minutes (with games)
8-12 years	3 times a week	1 to 2 hours (with games)
13-18 years	4 to 5 times a week	1.5 to 2 hours (with games)

10. Change your sport

- Playing different sports will decrease the risk of overuse injuries. Playing the same sport year-round increases the risk of injury.
- Vary sports to work different muscle groups. Example: If playing a throwing sport (baseball, quarterback), change to leg-focused sport (soccer, cross country).
- Athletes can have a primary sport, but they should rest from that sport at least 3-4 months per year.
- Know the limits and guidelines of each sport. Guidelines, like the number of pitches per week for baseball, running distances for track and swimming strokes for swimmers, help prevent overuse injuries.
- Guidelines need to be followed in games and weekly practices.
- Many teenage athletes quit sports because of low-grade pain. Low-grade pain can be a result of poor training and overtraining. "Dropouts" can be prevented with good training.

11. Keep your head

Young athletes should be praised on effort and sportsmanship. Never punish or criticize athletes for losing a game. Athletes get distracted with negative feedback. This could lead to an injury. Be encouraging. Encourage your athlete, the team and coaches.

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