

Sports Injury Prevention Tips

American Academy of Pediatrics

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. Please feel free to use them in any print or broadcast story, with appropriate attribution of source.

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Injury Risks

All sports have a risk of injury. Fortunately, for the vast majority of youth, the benefits of sports participation outweigh the risks. 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.

The most frequent types of sports injuries are sprains (injuries to ligaments), strains (injuries to muscles), and stress fractures (injuries to bones). Injury occurs when excessive 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:

- Take time off. Plan to have at least 1 day off per week and at least one month off per year from training for 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 eyewear. Young athletes should not assume that protective gear will prevent all injuries while performing more dangerous or risky activities.
- Strengthen muscles. Conditioning exercises during practice strengthens muscles used in play.
- Increase flexibility. Stretching exercises 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), spearing (football), and checking (in hockey) should be enforced.
- Do not play through pain.
- Avoid heat illness 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.
- If children are jumping on a trampoline, they should be supervised by a responsible adult, and only one child should be on the trampoline at a time; 75% of trampoline injuries occur when more than one person is jumping at a time.

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.

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