



How to Prevent and Spot Overuse Injuries in Kids

Injuries from youth sports are almost impossible to avoid, but following the suggestions below can help prevent injuries and reduce the risk of long-term complications.

What types of injuries occur?

Kids sustain two types of injuries in playing sports: acute and overuse. Acute injuries usually result from a single, traumatic event and may include wrist fracture, ankle sprain, and shoulder dislocation. Overuse injuries are more difficult to diagnose and treat because they are usually subtle and occur over time. When repetitive trauma affects the tendons, bones, and joints, an overuse injury develops. Common examples include tennis elbow, swimmer's shoulder, Achilles tendinitis, and stress fractures.

Why do injuries occur?

There are various reasons why an injury might occur, including improper training, improper technique, equipment failure, and/or anatomic or biomechanical issues of the athlete.

How can I tell if my child is injured?

Most children will let you know when they are hurt, but for those kids who try to tough it out, parents and caregivers should watch for signs of injury such as:

- Avoiding putting weight on a certain body part (e.g., ankle or wrist) or favoring one side of the body over the other (i.e., limping)
- Appearing to be in pain when using a particular body part
- Inability to sleep
- Shortness of breath/trouble breathing during activity
- Headaches during or after activity
- Appearing to experience stiffness in the joints or muscles
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Difficulty sitting and/or climbing stairs
- Inability to feel the fingers or toes
- Experiencing unusual weakness
- Irritated skin and/or blisters

If your child experiences sharp, stabbing pain, he/she should stop the activity immediately. Playing through pain may make the injury worse and probably cut your child's season short. If you have any concerns that your child might be injured, speak with a physician or certified athletic trainer immediately. The sooner an injury is diagnosed, the more effectively it can be treated, and the sooner an athlete can return to playing.

References: Prevention and Management of Youth Baseball and Softball Injuries, AOSSM, www.sportsmed.org
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