

Coaches



Teaching Kids Safe Ways to Participate in Sports

Sports are a great way for kids to exercise, learn about teamwork and discipline—all while having fun. Research has shown that compared to their peers, kids who participate in sports attend school more often, are more community and civic minded, get in less trouble, and tend to be more successful in the workplace. To help kids enjoy the lifelong benefits of sports it's extremely important for coaches to teach them safe ways to participate.

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.

What is an overuse injury?

Kids sustain two types of injuries in playing sports: acute and overuse. Acute injuries usually result from a single, traumatic event such as fall or hit to the leg or arm. Some common examples of acute injuries are fractures, sprains and dislocations. 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.

How can I teach a child to play safe?

- **Encourage pre-participation physical exams every year.** Having an annual pre-participation physical exam allows for the screening, prevention, and treatment of any conditions.
- **Warm up properly before an activity.** Warming up before an activity involves gradually bringing an athlete's heart rate up from the resting level by engaging in a low-impact activity such as jogging in place. Teach your athletes to stretch their muscles to release tension and help prevent injury. Stretching involves going just beyond the point of resistance and should not include bouncing. Hold the stretch for 10-12 seconds.
- **Cool-down properly after an activity.** Have your athletes cool down after an activity which allows their heart rate to gradually return to a resting level. Once again, stretching may be helpful to avoid injury.
- **Use proper training and technique.** Coaches and trainers are there to help teach proper technique and avoid injuries. It is very important to have your athletes listen to and adhere to your instructions. Establishing and adhering to rules and procedures can help prevent injury. Most overuse injuries occur because of improper training or technique. Before beginning any training program or activity, work with a physician and/or another coach to make sure the program won't cause chronic or recurrent problems.
- **Increase training gradually.** When deciding when and how much to push your athletes to the next level, remember the 10 percent rule: do not increase training activity, weight, mileage or pace by more than 10 percent per week. This allows the body ample time to recover. Keep your expectations and your athlete's expectations in check.

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How can I teach a child to play safe? (continued)

- **Wear proper fitting equipment.** Make sure equipment such as running shoes are in good condition and fit properly. Something as simple as weekly equipment checks may help minimize injury potential.
- **Drink enough water.** Athletes often forget to hydrate—an essential step for the body to run well. Hydration allows muscles to work properly and avoid cramps and spasms. Be sure that your athletes take water breaks every 30 minutes or more often based on the level of activity and temperature.
- **Rest and take a break.** Kids who play sports year-round are more likely than others to experience overuse injuries because they aren't giving their bodies a chance to rest and recover. Encourage your athletes to take at least one season off a year. Have them mix it up and play different sports during the year so that the same muscle groups are not being used continuously, leading to overuse injuries.

How will I know if an athlete has an injury?

If an athlete experiences sharp, stabbing pain, you should stop the activity immediately. Playing through pain, may make the injury worse and probably cut the athlete's season short. If an athlete is bleeding, has swelling of the joints, can't put weight on the affected limb, or feels dizzy or physically ill, seek medical attention immediately.

What should I do if an athlete has an injury?

If an athlete experiences pain or other symptoms that might indicate an injury, seek medical attention and tell the athlete's parents or doctor immediately. The sooner an injury is diagnosed, the more effectively it can be treated and the sooner the athlete can return to playing.