

Preventing Sports Injuries in Children

In general, sports for children are safe. There are many benefits and the risks are low. Knowing how a child grows can help prevent injuries. It also helps to watch for injury. If your child is injured, early medical treatment is important. It may prevent long-term effects.

Sports injuries happen for many reasons.

- Children have different levels of coordination, strength and stamina.
- Bones, tendons, muscles and ligaments might not grow evenly. These areas are more likely to be injured.
- Children who look to be the same size and body weight can be very different in body make up. These children may also have different levels of strength. In a sport where classes are divided by weight, these differences may cause someone to be injured.

How do sports injuries occur?

The two most common ways that children have a sports injury are:

- **Hard collisions or falls.** These injuries are more likely to be severe when there is more speed and weight. Young children, in grade school, are normally slower (speed) and smaller (weight) than a teen. This means a younger child is less likely to be injured due to a collision or fall.
- **Overuse of a joint.** Too much stress on young muscles and bones may cause stress fractures, muscle strains or tears. It may also cause bones to be deformed.



How can they be prevented?

These tips can help prevent injury.

- **Supervise sports activities.** More injuries happen in free-play sports than in organized team sports. Being supervised makes injuries less likely to happen.
- **Have children use protective equipment.** This includes helmets, facemasks, protective padding and other gear.
 - Do not let children take part without proper protective equipment.
 - Inspect equipment often for signs of wear and proper fit. Fix or replace as needed.

Tips (continued)

- **Watch for signs of injury. Look for swelling, pain or limping.** Treatment can start early if the injury is noticed early. This may help prevent long-term problems.
 - Children may hide pain. This could keep you from knowing about and treating an injury. Let your child know that it is okay to tell you that they have pain.
 - Teach children that it is important to tell parents and coaches right away if they might be hurt. If something hurts, is swollen, red in color or hard to use, such as knee pain that makes it hard to walk, they need to tell someone.
- **Make sure your child is well conditioned to take part in a sport.** Some stress on joints and muscles is important for normal development. Set limits for activities and stick to them.
- **Be sure your child is eating the right foods at the right times, and staying hydrated. This will help your child perform better.**
 - Drink plenty of water before, during and after activities – drink every break. Sports drinks can be used for activities that last a long time or are high intensity.
 - Eat a small meal or snack that contains carbohydrates before the event. Also eat a meal or snack that contains both carbohydrates and protein within an hour of completing the activity. Snacks may be needed during longer events or tournaments.
- **Be sure your child gets good rehabilitation (rehab) after an injury.** Children often want to get back in the game. They may want to short-cut full rehab. Completing treatment reduces the chance for another injury. Talk with your child's doctor about what your child needs to do.

First aid for minor sports injuries

Most sports injuries are minor and involve soft tissue. Soft tissue injuries include pulls, sprains, strains, cuts and abrasions. First aid for these injuries will reduce swelling and pain.

When a minor soft tissue injury happens: Remember to R.I.C.E.!

- R** Rest the injured area to avoid any more damage.
- I** Ice should be put on the injured part.
- C** Compress. Wrap the injured area with elastic bandages, like an ACE™ bandage. Make the bandage snug, but not too tight.
- E** Elevate. Raise the injured area.



ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.