



Injuries in Young Athletes



THOUGH IT IS INEVITABLE

that some injuries will occur, you can help prevent injury in young athletes by stressing the importance of common sense, proper training and the use of protective equipment.



Tri Rivers
SURGICAL ASSOCIATES, INC.

*Orthopedic Surgery and
Musculoskeletal Medicine*

If your child gets hurt...

Whether you have an 8-year-old who plays soccer on an organized team or a teenager who likes to go skateboarding with friends, you know that participation in sports can provide your child with hours of enjoyment. As a concerned parent, you also recognize that an increase in activity brings an increased risk of injury. Common orthopedic injuries in young athletes include:

- **Broken bones (also known as fractures).** These account for 10 to 15 percent of all childhood injuries.
- **Heel pain (called Sever disease).** Usually occurring in children ages 6 to 12, Sever disease causes pain in the back of the heel, where the Achilles' tendon attaches to the bone.
- **Knee pain (patellar tendonitis).** This condition is caused by irritation of the tendons that hold the kneecap (patella) to the shinbone (tibia). It occurs most often in children who participate in jumping sports, such as basketball.
- **Little League elbow.** Pain along the inner portion of the elbow usually occurs in 10- to 14-year-olds who frequently engage in throwing activities.
- **Sprains.** Among teens, damage to the ligaments is common, especially in sprains involving the knees and ankles.

What to do if your child gets injured

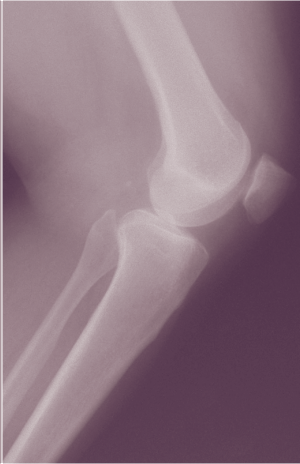
Because a child's body is still growing and developing, special care is required to promote healing and prevent long-term damage. Minor injuries can be treated with a few simple measures:

- Elevate the injured area and apply ice to reduce swelling.
- Give your child age- and weight-appropriate dosages of over-the-counter medications, such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen, to alleviate pain.
- Encourage your child to rest for a day or two, then gradually resume use of the affected muscle or joint.

When to see the doctor

Moderate to serious injuries require medical care to promote proper healing and prevent long-term damage to your child's growing body. You should seek immediate medical attention for your young athlete if:

- The injury has caused swelling, instability, deformity or another obvious change in the appearance of a bone or joint. This could signal a fracture or dislocation.
- The pain and swelling do not improve within 24 to 48 hours. An injury that causes prolonged pain, swelling or inability to use the affected area should always be treated by a physician.



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- Your child experiences recurring pain or sustains frequent injuries in the same area. These are symptoms of an injury caused by repetitive stress, such as Little League elbow or patellar tendonitis.
- Your child limps, winces or favors one limb over the other. In their enthusiasm, many young athletes will downplay injuries. By observing your child's body language, you can often tell if he or she is hurting.

Protecting your young athlete from injury

As a parent, your concern and common sense are your child's best protection against a serious or lingering orthopedic injury. Here are some ways to help your young athlete enjoy his or her favorite sport safely:

- **If your child participates in organized sports, get to know the coach.** Make sure he or she shares your belief that a child's health and well-being are more important than winning.
- **Don't allow a child under age 14 to train with weights.** The skeletal structures of children in their pre-teen years are incapable of withstanding the stress of weightlifting.
- **Insist that your child wear protective equipment.** Knee pads, wrist guards, bicycle helmets and other types of equipment can protect your child from serious injury due to falls, collisions and mishaps.
- **Encourage your child to stretch.** Just like adults, young athletes should stretch for about 10 minutes before and after activity to keep muscles loose and limber.
- **Teach your child to follow the rules.** In youth sports, many rules are in place specifically to help protect athletes from injuries that can occur during aggressive play.
- **Pull a tired athlete from the game.** Fatigue is a leading cause of sports-related injuries among young athletes. Encourage your child to rest when he or she feels tired.
- **Seek early treatment for injury.** Minor injuries can become more serious if they are not treated early and properly. If your child complains of pain and shows other signs of injury (i.e., limping, wincing or favoring one limb over another), seek medical care from your family doctor, an orthopedic specialist or another trusted medical professional.