

ST. NICHOLAS HOSPITAL HEALTHSOURCE

Practice Spring Sports Safety

When the warmer weather approaches, more and more children are going outside to play their favorite sports. From baseball to soccer to cycling, skateboarding, and more, the exercise and sportsmanship that develops from these activities is invaluable. However, no matter what sport your child is playing, it's important for him/her to "play safe."

Sports injuries are the number one reason for child visits to the emergency room. In 2003, the United States Consumer Safety Commission reported there were more than 3.5 million sports-related injuries in children younger than age 15. Data also indicates that two-thirds of those injuries could have been prevented with a little preparation, playing by the rules, and using the proper protective gear.

Some of the most common injuries are "overuse injuries" because they result from repeated or "overuse" of muscles and tendons. Overuse injuries are common in young players, especially in the arms of baseball pitchers and the elbows of young tennis players (tennis elbow). Stress fractures, shin splints, and patellar tendonitis (kneecap pain) is common in players of all sports.

Children are prone to these injuries since their bodies are still growing and their muscles, tendons, bones, and ligaments are, therefore, weaker than an adult's is. In addition, the "growth plates" of children's bones are still open, making bones prone to permanent injury.

The best way to avoid overuse injuries is to train in the off season, cross train in other sports to prevent overworking one specific area of the body, engage in warm-ups before participating in any sport, take appropriate rest breaks, replenish fluids, and cool down after participation.

Other ways to prevent sports injuries include having a physical exam before taking up any sport, wearing all required safety gear and seeing a doctor immediately if injured. Don't play through pain; have a first aid kit handy at all games and practices and make sure your child's coaches enforce rules and encourage safety. Most importantly, keep sports fun so that kids don't feel they have to push too hard and risk injury to win.



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