



Sports Safety Tips for Children and Teens

More than 38 million U.S. children and teens participate in organized sports each year. Sports help young people stay healthy and fit, make friends, learn teamwork, and develop their self-esteem. While the benefits of playing sports far outweigh the risks, sports injuries can and do occur. According to the Youth Sports Safety Alliance, sports injuries account for 20% of all injury-related emergency visits for children and youths ages 6–19. But there are steps you can take to help your children play as safely as possible.

Safety Tips

Encourage — Don't Push

Encouraging children to be physically active is good parenting. However, it's important to match children to the appropriate sport and not push them too hard. Children should not feel like they have personally disappointed you if their team loses.

Get Your Child a Pre-Participation Physical Exam

If your child has any undetected health issues that would preclude him or her from playing a particular sport, this is how you find out.

Learn the Rules of Your Child's Sport

Encourage your child to know and follow the rules, and to practice and perfect their playing skills. Proper form can help prevent injuries.

Don't Let Your Child Overdo It

Let children sit out practice or games if they are in pain, recovering from an illness or injury, or feeling too tired to play. Encourage them to take time off from one sport to learn another: this helps prevent overuse injuries.

Look Into the Coaching Staff's CPR and First Aid Training

Coaches should be trained in first aid and CPR, and have a plan for responding to emergencies. Ask whether the program uses a certified athletic trainer (AT — a healthcare professional who works with amateur and professional athletes to optimize performance in a safe, healthy way). Our Integrative Wellness Center has two ATs who work with a number of Marin schools and sports programs.

Have Your Child Gear up with the Right Equipment

Safety gear such as helmets, wrist and shin guards, and knee and shoulder pads must be in good condition, fit well, and be worn for every game and practice session.

Warm up, Cool Down, and Stay Hydrated

Warming up literally warms up the muscles and increases flexibility. Cooling down loosens up muscles that have tightened during the workout. Bring a water bottle to every practice and game. Young athletes need to drink plenty of water before, during, and after playing sports.

Slather on the Sunscreen

Protecting your child from sunburn will reduce the risk of developing skin cancer later in life.

Protect Your Child From Heat-Related Problems

Have your child wear light colored clothing. Use misting sprays to keep the body cool. Know the danger signs for heat-related conditions: confusion, dilated pupils, dizziness, fainting, headache, heavy perspiration, nausea, weak pulse, overall weakness, and pale and moist or hot, dry skin. If your child experiences any of the above conditions, seek medical help immediately.

Most Common Types of Sports Injuries

Sprains and Strains

A sprain is an injury to a ligament, the fibrous tissue that connects bones to a joint. Ankle sprains are the most common athletic injury. An injury to a muscle or tendon is called a strain. Tendons connect muscle to bone.

Concussions

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury that causes the head and brain to move rapidly back and forth. This sudden movement can cause damage to brain cells and create chemical changes in the brain. A concussion can be caused by a direct bump or blow to the head or by a strong jolt to the body. If a concussion is not recognized and managed properly, it can lead to serious consequences, including brain damage and even death.

Growth Plate Injuries

The growth plate is an area of developing tissues at the end of the long bones in growing children. This includes the bones in the hands, fingers, upper and lower legs, forearm, and feet. Growth plate injuries require a consultation with an orthopedic surgeon.

Repetitive Motion Injuries

Overuse and overexertion can lead to painful injuries such as hairline stress fractures and tendonitis.

Heat-Related Illnesses

Children are more prone to heat related injuries than adults because they perspire less and their core body temperature has to be higher before they start to sweat. (Perspiration helps cool the skin and maintain body temperature). Heat-related illnesses are highly preventable, but are also very dangerous. They include dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke, which is potentially deadly.



Contributing Factors to Sports-Related Accidents and Injuries

- Individual risk factors, such as an undiagnosed heart condition, excess weight, asthma, or sickle cell anemia
- Gender: Due to their anatomy, girls, especially soccer and basketball players, are 2–4 times more at risk for ACL injuries
- Lack of pre-season conditioning
- Inadequate, improper, or poorly fitting safety equipment
- Lack of proper eye protection
- Teaming up by age without regard to physical size
- Unsafe playing fields or surfaces
- Poor or inadequate training/coaching
- Inadequate warm up or cool down and improper stretching
- Playing while injured
- Stress due to excess pressure to win
- Playing in extreme heat
- Poor nutrition and inadequate hydration