

## **Preventing Sports Injuries In Children**

Sports for children are generally safe, with low risks and many benefits. Knowing how a child grows can help prevent injuries. It can also help you watch for injury. If your child is injured, early medical treatment may prevent long-term effects from the injury.

### **Why do children have injuries during sports?**

Injuries during sports activities occur for many reasons.

- Children have different levels of coordination, strength and stamina.
- Bones, tendons, muscles and ligaments may grow unevenly. This makes these areas more prone to injury.
- Children who look to be the same size and body weight can be very different in body make up. This may cause large differences in strength between two children of the same size. If competing 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 sports injuries happen to children are:

- **Hard collisions or falls.** Injury from collisions and falls is more likely to be severe when there is greater speed and weight. Younger children, in grade school, are typically slower (speed) and smaller (weight) than a teen athlete. As a result, the younger child is less likely to suffer injury because of 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 bone deformities.

### **Tips for preventing sports injuries**

- **Supervise sports activities.** More injuries occur in free-play sports than in organized team sports. Supervision makes it less likely that an injury will occur.
- **Have children use protective equipment.** This includes helmets, facemasks, protective padding and other gear.
  - Do not let children participate without recommended protective equipment.
  - Routinely inspect equipment for signs of wear and proper fit. Repair or replace as needed.

## Tips (continued)

- **Watch for early signs of injury such as swelling, pain or limping.** Recognizing an injury early means that treatment can begin early. This may help prevent long-term problems.
  - Children may hide pain. This may delay recognition and treatment of an injury. Let your child know that it is okay to admit that something hurts.
  - Teach children that it is important to let parents and coaches know right away if they might be hurt. If something is painful, swollen, red in color or hard to use (such as a knee that makes walking difficult), they should tell someone.
- **Make sure your child is properly conditioned to participate in a sport.** Moderate stress on joints and muscles is important for normal development. Set limits for activities and stick to them.
- **Encourage your child to complete proper rehabilitation after an injury.** Children often want to “get back in the game.” They may be tempted to short-cut full rehabilitation. Completing treatment reduces the chance for another injury. Talk with your child’s doctor about criteria for returning to sports.

## First aid for minor sports injuries

Most sports injuries are minor and involve soft tissue. Examples of soft tissue injury include pulls, sprains, strains, cuts and abrasions. First aid for minor soft tissue injuries reduces 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 the injured part by wrapping the area with elastic bandages (for example, an ACE™ bandage). Make the bandage is snug, but not too tight.
- E** Elevate 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 provide you with additional information about your child’s care. Diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up should be provided by your health care professional.**