

Athletes



When Play is Too Much

Sports are a great way for you to exercise and learn about teamwork and discipline—all while having fun! However, sports may also come with injuries, both the obvious, like broken bones, and the not so obvious, like tendinitis. These less apparent injuries are called overuse injuries, which often result from too much athletic play.

What is an overuse injury?

Injuries can be categorized into two groups: acute and overuse. Acute injuries are usually the result of a single, traumatic event such as fall or hit to the leg or arm. Some common examples of acute injuries are wrist fractures, ankle sprains, and shoulder dislocations.

Overuse injuries are more difficult than acute injuries to diagnose and treat because they are subtle and usually occur over time. When repetitive traumas affect the tendons, bones, muscles, and joints, an overuse injury develops. Common examples include tennis elbow, swimmer's shoulder, Achilles tendinitis, and shin splints.

Why do injuries occur?

There are various reasons why an injury might occur, including improper training, improper technique, equipment failure and/or anatomic or biomechanical issues of the athlete.

How can I tell if I'm playing too much?

Most of the time, you'll know you are hurt because you have some pain. However, the list below includes other signs that you are playing too hard and should talk to a parent, athletic trainer, or doctor right away:

- Can't put weight on a certain body part, such as the ankle or wrist
- Favor one side of the body over the other; begin limping
- Have pain when using a body part
- Can't sleep
- Have shortness of breath/trouble breathing during activity
- Have headaches during or after activity
- Experience severe joint or muscle stiffness
- Feel dizzy or lightheaded
- Can't sit and/or climb stairs
- Can't feel fingers or toes
- Experience unusual weakness
- Have irritated skin and/or blisters
- If you begin to have pain associated with play tell your athletic trainer, parent or coach. You should not be told or encouraged to play through pain.

References: Prevention and Management of Youth Baseball and Softball Injuries, AOSSM, www.sportsmed.org
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What should I do if I have an injury?

If you're in pain, STOP! If you are experiencing sharp, stabbing pain, you should stop the activity immediately. If you play through pain you risk making the injury worse and probably cutting your season short. If you are bleeding, your joints are swelling, or you can't put weight on the affected limb, or if you feel dizzy or physically ill, seek medical attention immediately.

Don't be afraid to say something. If you experience pain or other symptoms that might indicate an injury, you need to tell your coach, parent/caregiver or doctor immediately. The sooner an injury is diagnosed, the more effectively it can be treated, and the sooner you can return to playing.

How can overuse injuries be prevented?

- Get a pre-season health and wellness evaluation, which can identify possible health concerns that may lead to overuse injuries.
- Perform a proper warm-up and cool-down routine to prepare the body and help it recover from activity.
- Incorporate strength training and stretching into your training program.
- Hydrate adequately to maintain health and minimize cramps.
- Wear properly fitted protective equipment, including helmets, pads, shoes, and mouth guards.
- Wear sunscreen to protect the skin from repeated exposure to the sun during practice and games.
- Don't play one sport year-round. Taking one season off each year helps muscles recover from use and prevent overuse injuries.
- Play different positions or sports throughout the year to minimize the risk of overuse injuries.

Playing while injured does no one any good—not your team and especially not you. Keep yourself in the game by resting and taking care of your injuries.

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