

## Preventing Sports Injuries in Children

Sports help strengthen a child's mind, body and spirit. Unfortunately, sports injuries do happen. Here are some important injury prevention tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics that can help parents promote a safe, optimal sports experience for their child.

### Injury Risks

In general, the more contact in a sport, the greater the risk of injury. Most injuries occur to ligaments (connect bones together), tendons (connect muscles to bones) and muscles. Only about 5 percent of sport injuries involve broken bones. However, the areas where bones grow in children are at more risk of injury during the rapid phases of growth. In a growing child, point tenderness over a bone should be evaluated further by a medical provider.

Most frequent sports injuries are sprains (injuries to ligaments) and strains (injuries to muscles), caused when an abnormal stress is placed on tendons, joints, bones and muscle. As always, contact your pediatrician if you have additional questions or concerns.

### To reduce injury:

- **Wear the right gear.** Players should wear appropriate and properly fitting protective equipment such as pads (neck, shoulder, elbow, chest, knee, shin), helmets, mouthpieces, face guards, protective cups, and/or eyewear. Young athletes should not assume that protective gear will protect them from performing more dangerous or risky activities.
- **Strengthen muscles.** Conditioning exercises before games and during practice strengthens muscles used in play.
- **Increase flexibility.** Stretching exercises before and after games or practice can increase flexibility.
- **Use proper technique.** This should be reinforced during the playing season.
- **Take breaks.** Rest periods during practice and games can reduce injuries and prevent heat illness.
- **Play safe.** Strict rules against headfirst sliding (baseball and softball), spearing (football), and body checking (ice hockey) should be enforced.
- **Stop the activity if there is pain.**
- **Avoid heat injury.** Drink plenty of fluids before, during and after exercise or play; decrease or stop practices or competitions during high heat/humidity periods; wear light clothing.

### Sports-related Emotional Stress

The pressure to win can cause significant emotional stress for a child. Sadly, many coaches and parents consider winning the most important aspect of sports. Young athletes should be judged on effort, sportsmanship and hard work. They should be rewarded for trying hard and for improving their skills rather than punished or criticized for losing a game or competition.