

PREVENTION OF SPORTS INJURIES IN YOUNG ATHLETES

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Schools are back in session, fall is here and all our children, boys and girls, are involved in sports activities. Some are playing competitively with school or league teams and some are just having fun. All of us should be concerned with preventing injuries to our children while they are playing.

Prevention of injuries should start before actual play. In the Valley of the Sun, the first step is to **hydrate, hydrate, and hydrate**. We know that we all are losing water all the time here without being aware of it and this loss is increased by physical activity. Adequate fluid should be provided before and during activity. Supplements such as creatine should be avoided because they can increase dehydration.

No child should play or compete without the proper protective equipment. This may be as simple as shin guards for soccer or a bicycle helmet. In football protective equipment must be properly fitted, especially the helmet. An improperly fitting helmet makes head injury more likely. There should always be proper matting for activities like cheerleader practice or gymnastics.

No child should compete without the appropriate training and conditioning exercises. No child should compete against children who are so much stronger that they may seriously injure your child.

No child should compete when injured, despite their desire to not let down the coach or team. An injury which has not healed predisposes to a more serious injury. No child should be pressured into feeling winning is the only acceptable result. These are our children at play and it should be enjoyable for the child.

If your child is injured he should be evaluated by an experienced person, be it a physician, a trainer or others knowledgeable about sports injuries. No injured child should return to the game until they have been evaluated. In the case of a head injury, any child who was knocked out or shows signs of a concussion should not be returned to the game or compete again until a proper medical evaluation has been done. A child who sustains a new head injury before the prior injury is resolved is more likely to have serious sequelae.

In the case of any injury your child should not compete again until the injury is fully healed. When an injured area is reinjured before healing completely, it can result in a serious injury. A joint sprain can become torn ligaments or tendons if reinjured. Our girls are particularly susceptible to a tear of the anterior cruciate ligament of the knee when playing soccer and should play with healthy knees. Additionally if the injury results from overuse of a particular joint or muscle (like pitcher's elbow), the overuse injury should be fully healed before further competition. Our children have an entire life of sports ahead of them and we do not want that spoiled by failing to regard injuries properly.

Finally you have probably heard of children who have a sudden blow to the chest while competing and die in cardiac arrest. This is a very rare but tragic occurrence. The one treatment which may help in this

situation is to defibrillate the heart which can be done with an Automatic External Defibrillator (AED). You should be sure your school or sports organization has one available along with personnel trained in its use.

Injury prevention is a joint undertaking between you, your child, the coach and the trainer. You should discuss safety issues with your child and know that the coach and trainer also discuss this. The highest priority of the coach and trainer should be the health of your child.

Dr. Harvey Simon is Chief Medical Director of Good Night Pediatrics, which provides pediatric urgent care services to children and teenagers from 5 P.M. to 5 A.M. every night of the year at five locations around the Valley.