

Tips to keep young athletes injury-free

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Today's young athletes push themselves harder than ever before, which raises their odds for injury, experts say.

But there are proven ways to minimize injury rates, according to the Stanford Children's Health sports medicine team. Here's what they suggest:

Prepare for the season: Develop a comprehensive conditioning program for the off-[season](#) or when there are fewer games/meets. It should focus on strength, power, speed and coordination, which can improve your performance and reduce the risk of injury.

Always warm up: Always do a thorough warmup. Before any practices or games, you should do 5 to 10 minutes of aerobic activity, followed by active flexibility movements like high knees, butt kicks, skipping and arm circles.

Make training changes gradually: A rapid increase in amount or intensity of sport can increase the risk of overuse and traumatic injuries. After being off for several days due to an illness or minor injury, ease back into your sport with a modified training day.

Before the start of a new season, do daily jogs or cycles followed by dynamic warmups and strengthening exercises. This will help prepare your body for your sport.

Listen to your body: Don't ignore seemingly minor injuries. Doing so may make symptoms last longer, and also increase the risk of a more serious injury. Spend extra time on tight areas during warmup and ice sore areas after practice. Also, modify your training: A few short days of modified [training](#) can help a minor injury disappear and can prevent loss of playing time.

Eat, drink and sleep: A [healthy diet](#), proper hydration and adequate sleep are essential. A small protein-rich snack or drink immediately after activity improves recovery and performance the next day. Young

athletes should get 8-10 hours of sleep a night.

Create an off-season: It's important to take a break from your sport each year in order to reduce the risk of [injury](#), fatigue and burnout. Take at least four weeks off from a single sport each calendar year and do other sports and types of physical activity during that time.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [sports injuries](#).

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