

Overuse injuries more common in kids who specialize in individual sport

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Young athletes who specialize in an individual sport – such as gymnastics, tennis and dance – were at higher risk for overuse injuries (i.e. gradual onset of pain and symptoms), compared to those who focus on a single team sport, according to a study published in *The Physician and Sportsmedicine*. Acute injuries (i.e. from a single traumatic event) were more common in young athletes whose single sport was a team sport, especially football, cheerleading and soccer.

"Kids in an individual sports usually start specializing at a younger age than those in team sports, and individual sport athletes tend to spend more hours per week [training](#), which might explain why we see a greater proportion of [overuse injuries](#) among these athletes," said senior author Cynthia LaBella, MD, Medical Director of the Institute for Sports Medicine at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago and Associate Professor at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

Of 1190 athletes, 7 to 18 years of age, enrolled in the study, 313 reported participating in a single sport and training in that sport more than eight months of the year. Sports with the highest proportion of single-sport-specialized athletes were tennis, gymnastics and dance. These three sports also had the highest rate of serious overuse injury. The youngest age of sports specialization was seen in gymnastics (8.9 years), dance (10.8 years) and soccer (10.9 years).

"Better understanding of the relationships between sports specialization

and injury risk can help us design more effective injury prevention strategies," said LaBella. "For example, we know from previous studies that neuromuscular training may help to improve motor skills and performance while decreasing risk for [injury](#) among athletes specializing in a single sport. Our data suggest that [young athletes](#) specializing in individual sports may reap the greatest benefits from this sort of preventive neuromuscular training."

More information: Jacqueline Pasulka et al. Specialization patterns across various youth sports and relationship to injury risk, *The Physician and Sportsmedicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1080/00913847.2017.1313077](https://doi.org/10.1080/00913847.2017.1313077)

Provided by Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

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