

Injuries, burnout keep too many kids from sticking with sports: Report

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Sports provides many physical and mental health benefits to children and teens, but many quit due to injury, overtraining and burnout.

As many as 7 in 10 kids drop out of [youth sports](#) by age 13, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

A new AAP report calls attention to the potential underlying reasons why kids quit sports.

The clinical report—[published](#) online Jan. 22 in the journal *Pediatrics*—details how excessive training can lead to overuse injuries and a poorer quality of life for children.

"Sports are such a powerful and fun motivator to keep youth physically and mentally active, but some youth may feel pressure from parents, coaches and others to measure success only by performance," co-author Dr. Joel Brenner, a pediatric sports medicine physician in Norfolk, Va., said in a news release.

Common sports-related injuries often include damage done by repetitive stress, and [young people](#) could be at increased risk for these sort of overuse injuries compared to adults, the report says.

Kids' growing bones are less capable of tolerating stress than those of adults, and could be more susceptible to stress injuries.

The AAP report defines overtraining as a decrease in [athletic performance](#) due to an imbalance in the cycle of training and recovery.

Overtraining often is accompanied by persistent fatigue, poor sleep and mood swings, the report says.

Overscheduling and excessive training are two other potential risk

factors for burnout, both linked to children participating in too many sports. It's now common to see [young athletes](#) participating on multiple teams at the same time and training year-round, according to the AAP.

"Whether training is specialized or multisport, it becomes a problem when an athlete no longer has any free play time or opportunity to engage in other non-sport-related activities," said co-author Dr. Andrew Watson, a pediatric sports medicine specialist at the University of Wisconsin.

"Athletic competition and training will always prompt some stress that, when delivered in an appropriate way, leads to adaptation, success and enjoyment," he added. "When that stress becomes excessive, it can lead to burnout."

To help prevent burnout and keep young athletes healthy, the AAP recommends:

- Having a [physical exam](#) before participating, so an athlete's pediatrician can offer an overall approach to involvement in sports.
- Measuring success by participation and effort, to foster positive experiences and keep kids motivated.
- Promoting [skill development](#) and being well-rounded in [physical activities](#), while avoiding overtraining and overscheduling.
- Encouraging athletes to take a step back when there are signs of burnout.
- Keeping workouts interesting and fun by incorporating games into the training.

"It's important to teach our athletes to focus on wellness and to listen to their bodies," Brenner said. "We can encourage mindfulness, time away from [sports](#) and other ways to prevent injury or burnout. If you have

questions, always talk with your pediatrician."

More information: Joel S. Brenner et al, Overuse Injuries, Overtraining, and Burnout in Young Athletes, *Pediatrics* (2024). [DOI: 10.1542/peds.2023-065129](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2023-065129)

The Mayo Clinic has more about [burnout in youth sports](#).

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