

Sports injuries: Your guide to helping your child heal

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Youth sports are important for the development of children and teenagers, but there's no sure way to ensure a youngster doesn't get hurt while competing.

That's why it's important for parents to spot and appropriately respond to their children's sports injuries, Dr. Eileen Crawford, an orthopedic surgeon with the University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, said in a news release.

"Various types of injuries can happen with any sport, but some injuries are more commonly associated with specific activities," she said.

Contact or collision sports usually cause [traumatic injuries](#) like ligament tears and broken bones, Crawford said. On the other hand, sports like swimming, rowing and running tend to cause repetitive use injuries.

Meanwhile, gymnasts and pitchers are more likely to suffer bone or cartilage damage due to repeated high stress on their joints.

"While these are the common types of injuries we see in these sports, it doesn't mean that they are the only injuries that occur in a given sport," Crawford said.

Proper conditioning, stretching and warming up can help prevent sports injuries, she said. Children also can protect against injury by working on their core strength, balance, flexibility and proper form.

"While it isn't the fun part of participating in [youth sports](#), it can make it easier to avoid or bounce back from injuries," Crawford said. "Exercises that keep the body ready to fight against injury aren't always built into youth sports practices, so it's worth talking to coaches or getting your child involved in a supplemental exercise program if they aren't doing that type of training with the team."

Crawford also recommends that children engage in a variety of sports, to fully develop their body control and agility.

"It allows kids to play different sports at various times of the year, aiding in their overall development," she said.

Children also should be encouraged to foster activities outside sports, to cushion their [mental health](#) in the event of a debilitating injury, Crawford said.

"When your child's identity is solely tied to athletics, an injury that takes them away from sports is much more devastating than when the child can turn to other activities, hobbies and social groups," Crawford said.

If and when the worst happens, parents should be ready to respond quickly and appropriately to their injured child.

Certain injuries require immediate attention by an ER physician or a [family doctor](#), Crawford said. These include:

- Loss of consciousness, even briefly.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Abdominal pain from a sports injury.
- Changes in vision.
- Knocked out teeth.
- Vomiting from an athletic event.
- Blood in urine or stool.
- A deformed or broken limb.

"Rapid swelling or bruising of a body part you suspect is broken should be evaluated promptly as well, within a few days of the injury, but might not require an ED visit if no deformity or open wound is present," Crawford said.

Injuries that can wait to be treated at a doctor's office include those that appear to be muscular, have a gradual onset of pain, and involve

symptoms that only occur while participating in certain activities, she said.

"For injuries that appear gradually, begin treating them when symptoms occur by using ice, over-the-counter pain medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, compression and rest," Crawford said. "If pains persist, make sure that your child sees a physician to evaluate the symptoms in case there's an injury or disorder that won't get better by using these treatments alone."

Parents can help their child through a sports injury by remaining positive and calm, even if they expect the worst, Crawford said. "This will help your child process this journey as well as have confidence in their ability to heal," she said.

This support must extend to whatever physical therapy a child needs to recover from their injury, Crawford added.

"Whether it's physical therapy in a clinic, or working on [physical therapy](#) exercises at home, it's important to make sure your child is doing the proper exercises recommended to them to ensure a successful recovery," she said.

Advice from an athletic trainer can help during this recovery period, Crawford said.

"Athletic trainers have specific knowledge about the sport your child plays and typically know your child as well, so they can provide useful information on how your kid can [best] prepare to return to their sport after an injury and also work with them on techniques to get back up to speed once they've returned," Crawford said.

Parents also need to check in with their child frequently regarding their

mental health as well as their physical recovery, she said.

"Having an injury that takes them out of sports for a while can be mentally challenging for children since they miss time with their teammates, feel like they're falling behind, and may feel some loss of identity," Crawford said. "Their mental state will most likely shift over the course of the recovery period, and discussing their emotions surrounding the injury with them will help them process the situation."

There are some pitfalls that parents should keep in mind. Crawford warns against parents doing their own medical research online before talking to a doctor or health care professional.

"While having readily available internet access makes this easy to do, it can lead to lots of misinformation about the injury and how to treat it," she said. "Talk to your doctor first, get the correct diagnosis, and then ask your doctor to direct you to trustworthy resources."

Keep in mind that if you're unsure about your child's diagnosis, you can get a second opinion rather than turning to the Internet, Crawford added.

Parents also shouldn't put too much stock in the experiences of other children who've had what seems like the same injury, she said.

"Injuries can vary greatly in severity, and children recover at different rates," Crawford said. "Looking to the experiences of others can be useful to give some peace of mind and guidance, but it's important to remember at that your child is individual and needs to be treated in the way that is best for them."

Parents also need to remain patient and not place their [child](#) back into sports too soon, even if their kid is champing at the bit to return to competition.

"Children are remarkably quick and effective healers if they do it right the first time," Crawford said. "Not properly healing from a childhood [injury](#) can set [children](#) up for long term issues later in life. It's better to be patient with their healing than push the limit to get them back into sports too early."

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