

Doctor advises teens on how to get back in the game safely after shoulder injury

August 2 2024, by Joel Streed, Mayo Clinic News Network



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For teens who love playing summer team sports, an injury that takes them out of the game can be devastating. Shoulder injuries are among the most common for athletes who play volleyball, tennis, swimming,

football and a variety of others.

"The shoulder is an incredibly mobile joint that allows you to reach and rotate in a number of directions," says Robert Cates, D.O., Orthopedic Surgery and Sports Medicine, Mayo Clinic Health System. "The design of the shoulder, like a golf ball on a tee, unfortunately makes it easy to slip out of place with enough force. That's why injuries are so common with [contact sports](#)."

People in their [teens](#) and 20s, because they tend to be more physically active, are at highest risk for [shoulder dislocation](#). Also, people with looser joints can be prone to dislocation from smaller amounts of force.

However, if a shoulder becomes dislocated, it needs to be treated immediately. A dislocated shoulder is easy to detect due to a look of deformity, lack of movement and intense pain.

Between the time of injury and medical treatment, don't move the joint or try to put it back in place. Use a sling or splint to hold it in its current position. Ice the joint to reduce pain and swelling.

"Treatment will include putting the joint back into the correct position. If the joint has been badly damaged, surgery might be required," says Dr. Cates. "Icing and anti-inflammatory medications will relieve pain and swelling. Physical therapy will be prescribed to help you regain range of motion and strength or prepare the shoulder for surgery."

If surgery is required, treatment can be arthroscopic, which involves making small incisions to allow the surgeon to repair the damage, or open (larger incision) if the damage is more severe. Recovery time will depend on the extent of the injury. For most people, a shoulder joint improves over a few weeks.

"If surgery was part of treatment, full recovery may take five or six months," says Dr. Cates. "We know how badly teens want to avoid missing out on the fun of playing sports, but the greatest risk during healing for any [shoulder injury](#) is returning to activities before the shoulder is stable."

The best way to prevent a shoulder dislocation is to concentrate on good mechanics and strength conditioning. However, competitive and casual athletes can experience this injury despite the best preparation because so many are caused by contact or falls.

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Citation: Doctor advises teens on how to get back in the game safely after shoulder injury (2024, August 2) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-doctor-teens-game-safely-shoulder.html>

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