

Why kids should play more than one sport

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(HealthDay)—Playing team sports is a great way to teach kids life lessons about leadership, teamwork and how to socialize with peers. Sports are also a great way to build self-esteem and gain physical skills.

Most important, they're *fun*.

But too many—nearly three-quarters of young athletes—are specializing in just one activity as early as 7 years old, even playing on numerous league-level teams.

This puts them at risk for injury, stress, burnout and eventually abandoning sports, according to a report from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). About 70% drop out by age 13 for such reasons as pressure to perform or, conversely, not getting enough playing time. And at least half of athletic injuries are related to overuse. On the other hand, playing multiple sports offers benefits such as fostering a love of different activities that can last their entire lives.

To keep kids in the game, the AAP suggests encouraging them to play multiple sports until at least age 15. To lessen the risk of [injury](#), they need one or two days off every week.

If the decision has been made to specialize in a single sport, both [parents](#) and child should have a discussion with the child's pediatrician to evaluate whether the young athlete's goals are appropriate and realistic. Keep in mind that barely 1% of high school athletes get scholarships, and only a fraction make it to the pros.

Kids who do specialize should take one-month breaks from their sport, ideally at three different times each year, while pursuing other activities. Parents should watch out for too much pressure being placed on those in elite sports programs.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more about [sports and kids](#).

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