

Keep Young Athletes Healthy and Fit

Your children are back in school, and in today's age of health and fitness, more and more kids are involved in sporting activities. Although being part of a sports team is an important rite of passage for many children, parents and their children could be overlooking the importance of proper nutrition and body-conditioning needed for preventing injuries on and off the playing field.

The following tips can help ensure your child does not miss a step when it comes to proper fitness, stretching, training and rest that the body needs to engage in sporting activities.

Encourage your child to:

- ❑ **Wear the proper equipment.** Certain contact sports, such as football and hockey, can be dangerous if the equipment is not properly fitted. Make sure all equipment, including helmets, pads and shoes fit your child or adolescent. Talk to your child's coach or trainer if the equipment is damaged.
- ❑ **Eat healthy meals.** Make sure your young athlete is eating a well-balanced diet and does not skip meals. Avoid high-fat foods, such as candy bars and fast food. At home, provide fruit rather than cookies, and vegetables rather than potato chips.
- ❑ **Maintain a healthy weight.** Certain sports, such as gymnastics, wrestling and figure skating, may require your young athlete to follow strict dietary rules. Be sure your child does not feel pressured into being too thin and that he/she understands that proper nutrition and caloric intake is needed for optimal performance and endurance.
- ❑ **Drink water.** Hydration is a key element to optimal fitness. Teenage athletes should drink at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. Younger athletes should drink five to eight 8-ounce glasses of water.
- ❑ **Drink milk.** Make sure your child has enough calcium included in his/her diet. For children over 2 years of age, ACA recommends 1 percent or skim milk rather than whole milk. Milk is essential for healthy bones and reduces the risk of joint and muscle related injuries.
- ❑ **Avoid sugar-loaded, caffeinated and carbonated drinks.** Sports drinks are a good source of replenishment for those kids engaged in long duration sports, such as track and field.
- ❑ **Follow a warm-up routine.** Be sure your child or his/her coach includes a warm-up and stretching session before every practice, game or meet. A slow jog, jumping rope and/or lifting small weights reduces the risk of torn or ripped muscles. Flexibility is key when pushing to score that extra goal or make that critical play.
- ❑ **Take vitamins daily.** A multi-vitamin and Vitamin C are good choices for the young athlete. Vitamin B and amino acids may help reduce the pain from contact sports. Thiamine can help promote healing. Also consider Vitamin A to strengthen scar tissue.
- ❑ **Avoid trendy supplements.** Kids under the age of 18 should avoid the use of performance-enhancing supplements, such as creatine. Instead, they should ask their coach or trainer to include weekly weight training and body-conditioning sessions in their workout.
- ❑ **Get plenty of rest.** Eight hours of sleep is ideal for the young athlete. Lack of sleep and rest can decrease performance. Sluggishness, irritability and loss of interest could indicate that your child is fatigued.

Chiropractic Care Can Help

Doctors of chiropractic are trained and licensed to treat the entire neuromusculoskeletal system and can provide advice on sports training, nutrition and injury prevention to young athletes.