

## Young Athlete Program: Football Injuries

UPMC Sports Medicine's Young Athlete Program brings together a network of specialists that provides individualized attention for injury prevention and management.

The goal of the Young Athlete Program is not only to treat athletes when injuries occur, but to focus on prevention and performance training to help them reach their full potential.

Our team of experts use cutting-edge, evidence-based techniques to help speed recovery, and quickly and safely prepare the athlete to return to competition. Physical therapists, physicians, athletic trainers, sports performance coaches, and other experts focus on prevention, nutrition, conditioning, and sport-specific training, tailored to an athlete's age and level of competition.

### Common Football Injuries

Football is one of the most popular youth sports in the nation. Athletes of all shapes and sizes can play this fast-paced and intense sport that requires technique, power and strength. With football being a contact sport, the chance for injury is greater. For this reason, football players need to be healthy, strong and technically sound in order to ensure their own safety and the safety of their teammates. common football.

Some common injuries include:

- Muscle strains are common in hips, lower back and legs
- Ligament sprains often occur in the knees and ankles
- Concussions
- Muscle/soft tissue contusions

Among more serious injuries are fractures, shoulder and elbow dislocations and ligament tears.



### Causes of Football Injuries

- Use of improper technique when tackling
- Poor conditioning or training
- Poor flexibility
- Inadequate core, lower extremity and upper body strength
- Poor cardiovascular and muscular endurance
- Lack of proper fitting equipment
- Trauma
- Non-contact / quick direction changes

## Overuse Injuries

Football has turned into a yearlong sport, which includes a rigorous season followed by offseason camps and training to prepare for the future. Due to the increased athletic demand of the sport, individuals tend to get involved in more performance enhancement training without proper rest. Continuous training, practicing and competing without rest can lead to overuse injuries.

If your athlete complains of pain or soreness that prevents him or her from participating for more than 48 hours, evaluation by a medical professional is advisable. He or she can also benefit from both upper and lower body strengthening programs to condition and prevent wear and tear on muscles, tendons and ligaments.

## Preventing Football Injuries

Performing a good warm up is very important prior to engaging in football training activities or competition. Practice should begin with a cardiovascular warm-up followed by dynamic stretching of the upper and lower extremities. This will help to improve flexibility and increase blood flow to the muscles to allow the body to easily adapt to the demands of the sport. In addition, having proper conditioning can help to decrease the risk of injury when the athlete is tired, as it is during this state where most injuries occur in football.

Learning proper technique can lead to further injury prevention. With the increasing epidemic of concussions and spinal cord injuries, it is important that athletes are taught and can consistently use proper technique when participating in football in order to avoid potentially dangerous injuries. Using improper technique can be potentially unsafe and dangerous for not only the individual but others as well.

Ensuring proper fitting and placement of all equipment can help to prevent injury. Improper fitting equipment such as loose helmet, poorly positioned leg or girdle pads, or poorly adjusted shoulder pads can submit your child to injury. Helmets need to be snug to support the head and neck during contact. Leg and girdle pads need to be properly positioned to prevent potentially harmful contusions and protect bony areas of the body. Lastly, shoulder pad should be snug but not restrictive to allow for normal breathing and chest expansion. They should also provide significant coverage of the chest and shoulder structures.

USA football launched its Heads Up Football program, which offers safety educational programs for football athletes, coaches and parents. They offer videos such as concussion recognition, heat preparation and hydration, proper equipment fitting and instruction of fundamentals and proper technique. For more information, please visit [www.usafootball.com](http://www.usafootball.com).

## Screening Young Athletes

Our team of sports rehabilitation experts provide injury prevention screenings to young athletes. These screenings can help uncover existing injuries and areas of weakness, and can help prolong participation in sports.

These 45-minute screenings include:

- Flexibility
- Strength
- Functional movement assessment

The results of the screening will help determine if a young athlete needs to consult with a physician, participate in physical therapy, or consider sport-specific performance training. UPMC Sports Medicine has the expertise and comprehensive services to support young athletes.

## Contact the Young Athlete Program

Regardless of age or sport, the Young Athlete Program has the expertise, technology, and services to make a difference for your athlete. For more information or to make an appointment, call **1-855-93-SPORT (77678)** or visit **[UPMCSportsMedicine.com](http://UPMCSportsMedicine.com)**.

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