

Young Athlete Program: Soccer Injuries

The Young Athlete Program at UPMC Sports Medicine brings together a team of sports medicine experts that provide individualized attention for injury prevention and management for young athletes.

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, science-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 Soccer Injuries

Soccer is one of the fastest growing sports for youth in the U.S. It's great for improving heart health, coordination, balance, and agility. Soccer promotes overall fitness and teamwork.

Although it's a fairly safe sport, almost half a million soccer injuries are treated each year. Along with prevention, early intervention and treatment of injuries can help keep young players on the field.

Overuse injuries to the lower body are the most frequent injuries for soccer players. These include muscle strains, usually in the thigh, calf, or groin, as well as ankle injuries. Also common are shin splints and knee pain from swelling of the tendons and ligament sprains.

In addition, injuries can result from a sudden change in direction of the body over the knee or a kick to the leg.



More serious problems, such as tears in cartilage or the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL), may require surgery.

Head and neck injuries are possible as well. Concussions, which can be due to player contact or a fall, range from mild to severe. Symptoms may show up right away or hours later.

Causes of Soccer Injuries

- Improper training
- Improper stretching
- Improper strengthening
- Lack of warm-up or cool-down
- Overuse

Treating Soccer Injuries

Overuse injuries can occur with high frequency in today's young athlete. The most common symptoms are pain, swelling, and a decreased ability to perform actions like running, changing of directions, and kicking the ball.

A thorough medical evaluation can determine the best way to treat this injury. Also common are shin splints and knee pain from swelling of the tendons and ligament sprains.

The experts at the Young Athlete Program can work with your pediatrician to evaluate and aggressively treat the injury to help prevent more serious long term programs.

After a period of rest, an athlete may need physical therapy or rehabilitation to regain strength and flexibility in the affected area. UPMC Sports Medicine can design a sport-specific exercise program when strength and range of motion return to pre-injury levels and pain is gone.

If surgery is needed, an athlete will complete a rehabilitation program designed specifically to return them to play once medical clearance is obtained.

Preventing Soccer Injuries

Performing a good warm up is very important prior to engaging in soccer activities or competition. Practice should begin with a cardiovascular warm-up followed by dynamic stretching of the upper and lower body. 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, for it is during this state where most injuries occur in soccer.

Learning proper technique with landing and cutting can lead to further injury prevention. The ACL provides stability for an athlete to land and pivot. When the front thigh muscles contract to help with stabilization, the ACL is stressed, increasing the risk of injury. Learning to use other muscles to help with stability can reduce the risk of an ACL tear by 82 percent.

When landing, the knees should be behind the toes and stacked on top of the ankles. Landing with a straight leg forces the knee to absorb four times the body's weight. The hips should be positioned as if the player is about to sit in a chair. The trunk/abdominal area should land flexed, not in an upright position. Eliminate side to side motion when landing, and land softly. If the feet "slap," the muscles are not absorbing the load.

Cutting or pivoting — a sudden change in direction — is common in sports such as soccer and basketball. Often athletes, especially females, cut or pivot over a straight leg or cross over their legs to change direction. Proper cutting involves changing directions on the outside leg, the leg away from the direction the athlete wants to go.

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.

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