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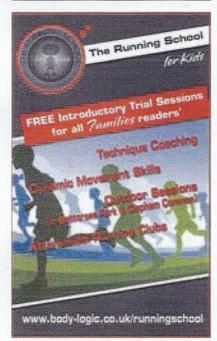
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Overuse injuries in children —when sport becomes 'too much, too soon'

By Christine Julien-Laferrière, physiotherapist

As parents, we hope our child will get all the benefits of sport, which far outweigh the risks. However, in recent years, physiotherapists have seen an increase in "overuse injuries" in children. Too much sport and too much of a single sport can lead to overuse injuries.



Overuse injuries arise gradually over time. They occur from repetitive actions such as throwing in volley ball, kicking in football, quick jumps...Using the same group of muscles or movement leads to muscle imbalance and poor mechanics which can stress the muscles, ligaments, tendons, bones and growth plates. Children who experience rapid growth may be more at risk. As the bones grow before the muscles, the muscles become tight. These issues particularly concern the knee and the foot (Osgood-Schlatter and Sever disease), the elbow and the shoulder.

What are the signs and how to recognise an overuse injury?

- X Pain. You should help your child to recognise his aches and pains
- Swelling and tenderness over the injured area
- Demotivation, disinterest
- X Decrease or loss of function

How to prevent overuse injuries?

- ✓ Avoid 'too much too soon'
- Watch for excessive training schedules or big increases (intensity, frequency, duration)
- Avoid practising one single sport intensively
- Favour early sport diversification. Playing different sports is important for your child's overall development especially before puberty
- Ensure good rests, breaks and recovery time, adequate warm-up and cool-down
- Use appropriate equipment
- Ensure the child is taught proper technique and conditioning

If you suspect an injury, have your child examined by your doctor or by a paediatrics physiotherapist. They will assess, diagnose, discuss a treatment plan and provide advice. If necessary, he/she might be referred to a paediatric orthopaedic consultant. If your child is limping or cannot move a joint you should see someone quickly. It is important to diagnose and treat overuse injuries as early as possible to get the best outcome, prevent bone growth issues and chronic problems. As for adults, unresolved injuries can lead to recurrent or further injuries. Your child might be prescribed to rest, slow down, decrease or stop temporarily an activity to prevent aggravation and allow recovery.

Physiotherapists are highly trained in musculoskeletal and sports specific conditions and are experts in assessing, diagnosing and treating overuse injuries. They will also look for their underlying causes: biomechanical, alignment, flexibility, endurance, balance or neuromuscular control. The physiotherapy treatment can include manual therapy, prescription of specific corrective exercises program, taping and advice on a conditioning program and preventive measures. The physio can also liaise with the PE teacher or coach. The goal being to help your child to return gradually to physical activities prevent further injuries and focus on a long-term physical lifestyle. www.physio4all.com Physiotherapy Osteopathy and Sports injury Centre

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