



Sports Physicals: Play Safe!



All athletes need to play it safe on the court and on the field. Young athletes need to be even more aware of safety because they are more susceptible to injury since their bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments are still growing. What is often a bruise or sprain in an adult can be a potentially serious injury in a young athlete.

Have fun and stay safe by following these guidelines:

- Follow the rules of the sport
- Wear appropriate protective gear
- Always warm up before playing
- Avoid playing when very tired or in pain
- Be cautious exercising when it is very hot and humid outside

The most common concerns to watch for are **dehydration**, **heat stroke**, **soft tissue injuries**, and **concussions**.

DEHYDRATION

Dehydration means the body doesn't have enough water to keep it working well. Our bodies require water for many normal functions, including sweating. The body cools itself by sweating, so if your body does not have enough fluids to sweat, you can overheat. Signs of dehydration include feeling lightheaded, dizzy, or tired; rapid heartbeat; dry lips and mouth; not peeing as much or dark or strong-smelling pee.

Prevent dehydration by drinking water before, during, and after playing sports. Juice, sports drinks, and milk are also okay, but avoid drinks with caffeine because they make you pee more and lose more fluid. Water is the perfect drink for athletes.

HEAT STROKE

Heat stroke can happen if the body's temperature increases too much. Weather conditions like extreme heat/humidity or dehydration can prevent the body from cooling itself by sweating. Signs of heat stroke include:

- Not sweating (or sweating profusely)
- High body temperature (105 degrees or more)
- Hot, dry, flushed skin
- Confused, delirious behavior
- Loss of consciousness or coma

Heat stroke is a medical emergency! If heat stroke occurs: Immediately call for medical help, then start first aid. Move the victim to a cool place. Cool the victim quickly by sponging with cool water and by fanning. Offer a conscious person half a glass of water every 15 minutes.

To avoid becoming dangerously overheated: drink cool water every 15 to 20 minutes while exercising, gradually increase the amount of time you spend in the heat to help your body adjust, and use salt on your food. Watch for early signs of heat stress, such as muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, nausea/vomiting, fainting, heavy sweating, and pale skin. Drink water and take steps to cool down if these symptoms occur.

SOFT TISSUE INJURIES

About 95% of sports injuries are caused by minor trauma involving soft tissues, such as ligaments, muscles, and tendons.

Sprains

A sprain is a partial or complete tear of a ligament. Ligaments are tough bands of tissue that connect the ends of bones and stabilize the joints. Symptoms include the feeling that a joint is loose or unstable, the inability to bear weight because of pain, loss of motion, hearing the sound or feeling the sensation of a "pop" or "snap" when the injury occurred, and swelling. Not all sprains produce pain.

Strains

A strain is a partial or complete tear of a muscle or tendon. Muscle tissue is made up of cells that contract and make the body move. A tendon consists of tough connective tissue that attaches muscles to bones. Symptoms include pain, stiffness, swelling, and bruising.

Contusions (bruises)

Bruises result when a blunt injury causes underlying bleeding in a muscle or other soft tissues.

Remember **R.I.C.E.** to treat soft tissue injuries. If symptoms persist, your doctor may need to check the injury or get it X-rayed. You can make an injury worse by playing through pain.

REST the injury

Put **ICE** on the injury

Use **COMPRESSION** to help reduce swelling (i.e. wrap with an ace bandage)

ELEVATE the injured body part as much as possible

CONCUSSIONS

The brain is made of soft tissue and is cushioned by spinal fluid. It is encased in the hard, protective skull. When a person gets a head injury, the brain can bump around inside the skull. This can lead to bruising of the brain, tearing of blood vessels, and injury to the nerves, which can cause a concussion – a temporary loss of normal brain function.

Even if you don't pass out from a head injury, you may still have a concussion. Signs of a concussion:

- Seeing stars and feeling dazed, dizzy, or lightheaded
- Memory loss
- Nausea or vomiting
- Headaches
- Blurred vision and sensitivity to light
- Slurred speech or saying things that don't make sense
- Difficulty concentrating, thinking, or making decisions
- Difficulty with coordination or balance

If you are hit in the head during a game, tell an adult or coach immediately so you can be monitored for a concussion. If your symptoms get worse, or if you have seizures or a very long period of unconsciousness, you may have a serious head injury and need immediate medical help.

After a concussion, the brain needs time to heal. It's very important to have clearance from your doctor that all symptoms of your concussion are gone before returning to sports. Getting a second head injury before the first one is completely healed can be dangerous.

Prevent concussions by wearing appropriate headgear and safety equipment when biking, roller-blading, skateboarding, snowboarding or skiing, and playing contact sports like football.