



KIDS CORNER - LE COIN DES ENFANTS

The Pediatric Sport and Exercise Medicine Committee

Overuse Injuries, Overtraining and Burnout in Child and Adolescent Athletes

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Most sport medicine physicians see a number of young athletes in the course of their week. It is likely that most of the complaints are of overuse injuries, since acutely injured youth frequent the emergency rooms. It has been suggested that injuries and burnout may be factors which contribute to the decline in sport participation seen in adolescents and younger adults.

“Pediatrics”, the monthly journal of the American Academy of Pediatrics, recently published an article written by Joel Brenner and the Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness outlining guidelines for clinicians about overuse injuries, overtraining, and burnout (Pediatrics 2007; 119:1242-1245). The article reviews evidence about overuse injuries and overtraining in child and youth athletes and outlines guidelines for safe participation. Little evidence about child and adolescent sport injuries exists, so the guidelines are based on author and committee opinion and expertise.

The guidelines serve to remind us of the opportunities that present to us when we are seeing these young athletes. The article also encourages us to be advocates for our pediatric patients and to continue to educate coaches, athletes, and parents about safe participation in sport for “optimal performance and good health”.

Recommendations are presented as “Guidance for the Clinician” and are summarized below:

1. Encourage athletes to have one or 2 days off per week to allow physiological and psychological recovery.
2. Advise athletes not to increase training volume by more than 10% per week.
3. Encourage 2 to 3 months away from each sport per year to reduce the risk of overuse injury and burnout.
4. Emphasize that participation is for fun, skill acquisition, safety and sportsmanship.
5. Encourage participation in only one team per season (include rep or select teams)
6. Non-specific symptoms, joint pains, fatigue, and poor school performance may be symptoms of burn-out. Assessing the child’s motivation for sport participation may be appropriate.
7. Advocate for medical advisory boards for week end tournaments to educate about heat/cold illness, over participation and associated overuse injuries and burnout.
8. Encourage educational opportunities for athletes, parents and coaches about nutrition and fluids, sport safety, injury and overtraining avoidance to ensure optimal performance and good health.
9. Convey a special caution to parents with younger children who play in multi-game tournaments in short periods of time especially with respect to heat illness, nutritional and hydration deficiencies, fatigue and overuse injuries.

Many of us recognize these recommendations to be counter to popular sport culture. But we can have a positive impact on the health of these young athletes by consistently endorsing the guidelines, which should increase the likelihood of them enjoying lifelong physical activity.

