



Fall Sports

Back to school each fall means back to the books, but it also means getting back into fall sports. Since many kids spend the summer relaxing and enjoying their time off, participating in football, cross-country, soccer, cheerleading and other strenuous sports can also put a strain on out-of-shape muscles, tendons, and bones. Since most schools now require that kids participate on some level in sports, it's important to keep in mind some basic rules of thumb.

Each child physically matures at his or her own rate, and has a different degree of athletic ability. No amount of training can improve a child's natural athletic ability, but training helps improve coordination and therefore performance. Parents should encourage their children to participate in sports, but never forget that competition should be fun.

Children active in sports programs will improve their cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems, coordination, and state of mind. In addition, participation in sports develops a sense of self, discipline, teamwork, and the recognition of the importance of a healthy body.

Probably the single most important way to avoid injuries in all sports is to warm up before participating. Warming up helps to loosen muscles and prevent injuries in athletes of all ages. Learning to stretch at an early age will set a good pattern for sports activities as the body develops. In addition, it's extremely important to wear the correct shoes for the sport. Your podiatrist can help you choose the right shoes for your children; the shoes should fit the sport.

According to podiatrists, repetitive overuse or improper training can lead to problems with ligaments, tendons, bones and joints in the feet. As children's feet are still growing, serious injuries can cause long-term problems.

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Ankle sprains, which can be stretched or torn ligaments, are more common than fractures. Watch for extensive swelling around the ankle. Immediate treatment by the podiatrist is crucial as he/she can provide treatment as well as recommended balancing and strengthening exercises to restore coordination quickly.

Shin splints are tiny tears or inflammation of the muscles on the front of the leg. Rest is the best way to heal these injuries, but if pain persists a podiatrist can recommend strengthening, specific shoes, or orthotics (insoles).

Sever's disease (aka Calcaneal Apophysitis) is an inflammation of a growth plate where the Achilles tendon is attached to the heel bone and is often felt as pain on the bottom of or around the heel. Rest, ice, and heel lifts, and sometimes orthoses are often prescribed by the podiatrist in these cases.

Fractures/stress fractures from overuse in child athletes are commonly seen in podiatric medical offices. Growth plates are particularly susceptible to injuries, but mid-shaft fractures of the bone also occur. If a fracture is not severe, rest and immobilization may be the best treatment. More complicated injuries may require casting or surgical correction. If swelling and pain persist, see a podiatrist immediately.