

Reducing Your Child's Risk of ACL and Sports-Related Injuries

There's a jump in sports injuries among kids. Here's what you can do about it.

Weekend-long soccer tournaments. Back-to-back baseball games. Daily, early morning hockey practices. Sometimes all in the life (and week) of one youth athlete.

The face of youth sports has changed in recent decades. Most kids used to enjoy unstructured free play with friends. Maybe they also played on an organized sports team one season a year. Today's youth athletes compete year-round in a non-stop flurry of sports. And their bodies often take a beating.

From stress fractures to tendonitis, there's been a rise in sports-related and overuse injuries diagnosed and treated among kids and teens—especially Anterior Cruciate Ligament, or ACL, tears and injuries. Data published this March in *Pediatrics* reported the incidence of ACL tears in patients ages 6 to 18 increased 2.3% annually over the last 20 years. A 2015 UHealth national data assessment also showed alarming increases.

“In kids ages 15 and younger, between 1994 and 2006, we saw a [924% increase](#) in ACL reconstruction surgeries nationally performed,” says Dr. Michael Baraga, an orthopedic surgeon at the UHealth Sports Medicine Institute, part of the University of Miami Health System.

Why are the rates rising?

Part of the rise, Baraga offers, is more ACL and sports overuse injury awareness among doctors and the public (with more awareness comes a higher likelihood of

seeking medical help). Better diagnostic technology also is helping doctors accurately determine more cases. But there's another very influential factor.

"Today's young athletes play in a more competitive, more demanding - physically and mentally - way," he explains. "They participate in high-demand sports at earlier ages; they play more frequently often with no downtime; and they are encouraged, or push themselves, to perform at more elite levels. The result is not enough time for their growing bodies to heal and recover."

Does that mean your family's future Simone Biles, Hope Solo or Devin Booker is destined for injury?

Thankfully, no.

Here are some steps you can take to reduce your child's risk.

- Take a gradual approach to new sports. (Don't push too far, too fast.)
- Help your child to become a better athlete overall by not having him/her play the same sport year-round.
- When choosing other sports, encourage sports that cross-train the whole body. (If your child plays a throwing sport one season like softball, consider a sport that uses more lower body the next season, like soccer).
- Take at least one season off each year to help the body recover and stay sharp.
- Don't program multiple sports all in the same season.
- Encourage good old-fashioned "just for fun" free play.
- Make sure your child is playing his/her sports correctly. (Proper form and training are crucial to reducing injuries at any level.)

Finally, don't ever allow your child to play through pain. If you suspect they've

suffered a sports injury, get medical care immediately. The faster these injuries are treated, the better the prognosis for a full recovery, and a lifetime of fun and wellness.

To make an appointment with an expert at the [UHealth Sports Medicine Institute](#), please call (305) 243-3000 or use our [online appointment request form](#).