Staying in the Game
A Care Guide for Adolescent Athletes
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Prevention
The best way to stay in the game is to be prepared to avoid problems.
Sports Physical

Why It’s Important:

- The exam helps determine whether it’s safe for you to participate in a particular sport and reviews your general well-being. It includes a history and physical exam.

- Most states actually require that kids and teens have a sports physical before they can start a new sport or begin a new competitive season.

- Even if a physical isn’t required, doctors still highly recommend getting one so you are prepared for sports.

What To Do:

- Schedule an exam. It’s up to a parent to get you an appointment for a sport physical. This can be done by your regular health provider or a doctor who specializes in sports medicine. Some older kids may be able to get a sport physical at school.

- Be honest. It is very important to tell your provider all about yourself so decisions can be made to keep you safe.

- Listen to advice. All athletes want to play, and health providers want you to play safely. Work with your providers, family, and athletic staff to make the best decisions for you.

Think Prevention:

- Get it done early. Schedule your physical about 6 weeks before the sports season starts so any problems or concerns can be addressed before workouts and competitions begin.

- Dress for activities. Wear or bring shorts and a sports bra so your provider can check your fitness level.

- Don’t skip your annual checkup. This physical only focuses on sports so you still need your annual checkup to spot changes in your overall health.
Conditioning for Sports

Why It’s Important:

- Warming up helps prepare the body for exercising, both physically and mentally. Stretching helps make your muscles more flexible.

- When you warm up, you are moving your large muscles, like your arms and legs, which literally warms up the temperature of both your body and your muscles.

- This helps prevent injuries by boosting the amount of nutrients and oxygen delivered to your muscles and preparing the body for a demanding workout. It also makes it easier to burn calories during the workout.

What To Do:

- Make it sport specific. Do warm ups and stretching that go with your sport. Focus on the muscles that are used for your sport. For instance, if you play baseball you might focus on your shoulder for throwing or your forearm for batting.

- Remember to breathe. Breathing is a necessary part of any workout, including warming up and stretching.

- Practice equality. Even if you are a righty, it doesn’t mean that you should neglect the left side of your body. Make sure you stretch both sides equally so all of your muscles are evenly ready for action.

Think Prevention:

- Cool down after your workout. The most efficient way of slowing down a car or bike isn’t by riding straight into a brick wall. The same way you have to gradually slow down your bike or car, you need to slow down your body after a workout or exercise.

- Avoid injury. Whether you are new to working out or have been playing a sport your entire life, adding a good before-and-after routine to your workout will give you the best chance of avoiding injuries and may even help improve your performance.
Sports Nutrition

Why It’s Important:

- Athletes might need more food because they burn more calories by practicing and playing so much.

- Even so, each kid is different. A practice can be an intense or light workout depending on how hard and how long you work.

- The amount of food you eat should match the amount of energy you burn while playing your sport.

- If you don’t eat the right amount or types of food, you won’t perform well.

What To Do:

- Eat a balanced diet. A balanced diet can give an active, growing body all the energy it needs for sports. Some strategies such as eating high-protein diets, taking supplements to perform better, skipping meals, or eliminating certain food groups can cause serious problems, like kidney damage.

- Eat calcium-rich and iron-rich foods. Calcium found in low fat dairy, dark green vegetables, and in fortified products like orange juice builds strong bones, which are less likely to break under the stress and strain of heavy activity. Iron-rich foods such as lean meat, dried beans, and fortified cereals are needed to build blood cells that bring oxygen to muscles. Without enough iron, kids might get tired more easily.

Think Prevention:

- Plan your meals. It is best to eat 2 hours before a practice or game and to avoid high-fat or sugary foods so your body can focus on the sport instead of digesting food.

- Be sure to include enough fluids. Most athletes need to drink 16 oz. before exercise, 4 oz. every 15-20 minutes during exercise, and 16 oz. after exercise to stay hydrated.

- Ask for help. If you’re concerned about your weight or your diet, you might want to talk with your doctor or a dietitian who specializes in helping athletes.
Injuries

When injury occurs, follow these tips to get back in action.
Sprains and Strains

Definition:
- A sprain is a stretching or tearing of ligaments.
- A strain is a stretching or tearing of muscle or tendon.

Signs and Symptoms:
- Bruising
- Swelling
- Unstable to walk
- Pain
- Difficulty moving injured area

What To Do:
- See your health provider. Don’t wait if you have severe pain, swelling, or changes in feeling to the area.
- Rest. It is important to protect from further injury and allow your body to heal.
- Ice. The cold helps decrease inflammation and swelling. Limit exposure to 20 minutes at a time to protect skin.
- Compression. Wrapping the area or wearing a brace helps limit swelling.
- Elevation. Try to elevate the area to allow swelling to drain.
- Pain relief. Take ibuprofen or acetaminophen for pain.

Think Prevention:
- Wear protective gear such as helmets, protective pads, and other gear as suggested for your sport.
- Warm up and cool down.
- Know the rules of the game.
- Watch out for others.
- Don’t play when you’re injured.
- Ask your provider when you are healed enough to return to play safely.
Overuse Injuries

Definition:

- Injuries to muscles, bones, or joints from repetitive sports activity without enough rest time.

Signs and Symptoms:

- Tingling, numbness, or pain in the affected area
- Stiffness or soreness in the neck or back
- Feelings of weakness or fatigue
- Popping or clicking sensation

What To Do:

- See your provider as soon as possible. He or she may give you pain medicine or send you to a therapist.
- Rest. You may need to adjust your activities to give your body a chance to heal.
- Ice. The cold can help decrease inflammation.

Think Prevention:

- Vary your day-to-day activities. Be sensible about the amount of time you spend doing any repeated motions. If an activity is repetitive, take breaks and do something different every 30 minutes or so.
- Wear the proper clothing, shoes, and equipment for your sport. Be sure what you wear fits properly and is not worn out.
- Use good technique. Errors in training, such as doing too much too soon, can lead to overuse injuries.
- Plan rest into your training schedule. This is especially important if you play the same sport year-round and on multiple teams. Rest time is crucial for recovery and peak performance.
Concussions

Definition:
- A temporary loss of normal brain function caused by a head injury.

Signs and Symptoms:
A concussion isn’t always well-recognized and can occur without passing out. Signs that you may have a concussion include:
- “Seeing stars” and feeling dazed, dizzy, or lightheaded
- Memory loss and trouble recalling things that happened right before or after the injury
- 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 (e.g. cannot catch ball or other easy tasks)
- Feeling anxious or irritable for no apparent reason
- Feeling overly tired

What to Do:
- Don’t hide your symptoms to stay in the game. Be honest about your symptoms. Speak up if you see concussion symptoms in your teammates.
- Stop playing and tell coaches/sports staff. Never return to playing the same day you get a concussion.
- Get seen by a health provider. Your provider will follow your symptoms closely and supervise a gradual return to play when your symptoms go away.
- Give your brain a rest. This includes both thinking and physical activities.
- Be 100% before returning to sports and be cleared by a physician before playing.

Think Prevention:
- Wear the right protective gear for your sport. Make sure your gear fits properly.
- Play by the rules.
- Get in good condition before the season. Playing sports when you’re out of shape can make you more prone to make mistakes that can lead to injury.
Medical Conditions

Follow these tips to keep medical concerns in check.
Asthma

Definition:
- Airways get tight and swollen from inflammation, which is reversible.

Signs and Symptoms:
- Wheezing
- Coughing
- Can’t keep up with others
- Shortness of breath
- Chest tightness

What To Do:
- Let your sports staff know you have asthma. Give them a written care plan from your provider.
- Keep any medicine you take on the sidelines. Carry any prescribed medications with you at all times and make sure your sports staff knows where it is kept.
- Listen to your body. Follow the instructions your doctor gave you for handling breathing problems. If you have a flare-up, stop working out and let your sports staff know.

Think Prevention:
- Get your asthma under control before playing sports. It’s very important that you take all asthma medicine just like your doctor tells you to, even when you are feeling OK.
- Make sure your coach and teammates know about your asthma. That way, they will understand if you need to stop working out because of breathing trouble. It’s also helpful if your coach knows which steps to take if you have a flare-up.
- Know what triggers your asthma. This may mean skipping outdoor workouts when there is lots of pollen in the air, wearing a scarf or ski mask when you play outside during the winter, or making sure you always have time for a careful warm up and cool down.
Heat Illness

Heat Cramps:
Heat cramps are brief, severe cramps in the muscles of the legs, arms, or abdomen that may occur during or after vigorous exercise in extreme heat. The sweating that occurs with vigorous exercise causes the body to lose salts and fluids. The low level of salts causes the muscles to cramp.

Heat Exhaustion:
Heat exhaustion is a more severe heat illness that can occur when someone in a hot climate or environment hasn’t been drinking enough fluids.

Symptoms may include:
- Dehydration
- Fatigue
- Weakness
- Clammy skin
- Headache
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Hyperventilation (rapid breathing)
- Irritability

What To Do:
- Let your sports staff know.
- Stop activity and get out of the heat if possible.
- Cool down.

Think Prevention:
- Stay hydrated. Thirst is not a good gauge. When you get thirsty, you are already dehydrated. Monitor your urine; it should be light colored when you are hydrated.
- Wear light-colored, loose clothing.
- Avoid workouts when heat is at its worst. Participate in heavy activity outdoors before noon and after 6:00 p.m.
- Build up your heat tolerance. It takes your body about 2 weeks to get used to exercising in the heat. Be sure to condition early so you are ready by the start of your season.
Mononucleosis

Definition:
Sometimes called “the kissing disease,” mononucleosis (mono) is an infection usually caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV). EBV is very common and many people have been exposed to the virus.

Signs and Symptoms:
Symptoms usually begin to appear about 4 to 7 weeks after infection with the virus. Signs that you may have mono include:

- Fatigue
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Loss of appetite
- Swollen lymph nodes (commonly called glands, located in your neck, underarms, and groin)
- Headaches
- Sore muscles
- Weakness
- Larger than normal liver or spleen
- Skin rash
- Abdominal pain

People who have mono may have different combinations of these symptoms, and some may have symptoms so mild that they hardly notice them. Others may have no symptoms at all.
What To Do:

- Get seen by your provider. Even if you have several of these symptoms, don’t try to diagnose yourself. Always consult your doctor if you have a fever, sore throat, and swollen glands or are unusually tired for no apparent reason.

- Tests. When making a diagnosis, the doctor may want to take some blood tests to see if mono is causing the symptoms.

- Issues for athletes. Mono can cause an organ called the spleen (located in your abdomen) to get swollen. If this happens, it can rupture easily, which can cause you to bleed and may lead to death. Your provider may keep you out of sports during the first 3 weeks of the illness, which is the time when this is most likely to occur. You may also have to get a test called an ultrasound to check your spleen or liver.

Think Prevention:

- Wash your hands often.

- Cover your nose and mouth when you sneeze or cough.

- Keep your drinks and eating utensils to yourself.
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