



Young athletes today are stronger, faster and push themselves harder than ever before. This has led to an increase in injury rates in youth sports. Fortunately, there are proven ways to minimize this risk. Here are a few tips from Stanford Medicine Children's Health sports medicine experts.

- 1. Prepare for the season.** In-season practice time is often devoted to sport-specific skills and tactical development, leaving limited time for other essential parts of training. Developing a comprehensive conditioning program focused on strength, power, speed and coordination can improve performance and dramatically decrease injury risk. This type of program can be done in the off season or during parts of the season where there are fewer games. A well-supervised program is appropriate for athletes as young as eight years old.
- 2. Always warm up.** A dynamic warm-up not only prevents injuries but also improves your performance. A simple run and stretch may improve flexibility, but it is not enough to prepare your body for the rigors of playing sports. Before any practices or games, you should perform 5 to 10 minutes of aerobic activity, followed by active flexibility movements like high knees, butt kicks, skipping and arm circles. These should be sport specific, aimed at preparing your muscle fibers and nervous system to respond to the demands of your specific sport.

- 3. Make training changes gradually.** Whether it's the beginning of the season or you're returning to sport after a brief rest period, your body needs time to adapt. Overuse and traumatic injuries are more likely to occur during a rapid increase in volume or intensity of sport. Even after taking several days off to treat an illness or minor injury, ease the transition back to sport with a modified training day. Before the start of a new season, a daily jog or cycle followed by a dynamic warm-up and strengthening exercises will prepare your body for your sport.
- 4. Listen to your body.** Take inventory of your body and note any areas that are tight or painful. Ignoring seemingly small injuries can not only make the symptoms last longer, but it also increases the risk of a bigger injury. Spend extra time on tight areas during warm-up and ice sore areas after practice. Modify non-essential aspects of training, when possible. A few short days of modified training can go a long way in

making a minor injury disappear and can prevent loss of playing time and significant injury.

- 5. Eat, drink and sleep for peak performance.** To ensure your muscles have the fuel they need to perform, you must get adequate hydration and refuel with post-activity meals. The body replenishes glycogen, the muscles' fuel, best within the first 30 to 45 minutes after any intense training or competition. Eating a small protein-rich snack or drink immediately after activity will improve recovery and performance the following day. Adequate sleep is also essential for growing athletes – 8 to 10 hours per night is ideal.
- 6. Create an off season.** All athletes need a break from their sport each year. Injury rates, fatigue and burnout increase significantly with year-round sports participation. We recommend taking at least four weeks off from a single sport each calendar year. Take advantage of other sports and physical activity during that time.



## Locations

### Burlingame

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Suite 122  
Burlingame, CA 94010

### Palo Alto

730 Welch Road  
Palo Alto, CA 94304

### Pleasant Hill\*

3480 Buskirk Avenue  
Suite 125  
Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

### Pleasanton

5000 Pleasanton Avenue  
Suite 200  
Pleasanton, CA 94566

### San Francisco

1100 Van Ness Avenue  
7th Floor  
San Francisco, CA 94109

### Sunnyvale

1195 West Fremont Avenue  
2nd Floor  
Sunnyvale, CA 94087

\* In partnership with John Muir Health

## Contact Us

Call **(844) 41-ORTHO (67846)** for appointments and more information, or visit us online at [ortho.stanfordchildrens.org](https://ortho.stanfordchildrens.org).