

## Five Ways to Avoid Sports Injuries

Playing sports is a lot of fun. Getting hurt is not. Take these five steps to prevent injuries so you can stay in the game:

1. Wear protective gear, such as helmets, protective pads, and other gear.
2. Warm up and cool down.
3. Know the rules of the game.
4. Watch out for others.
5. Don't play when you're injured.

Let's find out more about each of these.

### Wear Protective Gear

Protective gear is anything you wear that helps keep you from getting hurt. The gear you wear depends on the sport you play.

**Helmets** are the most common protective gear. They protect your all-important head while you're playing football, hockey, baseball, softball, biking, skateboarding, and inline skating, just to name a few!

Make sure you're wearing the right helmet for your sport. For instance, don't wear your baseball batting helmet when you're playing football! Your helmet should fit snugly but comfortably, and if it has a strap — like a bike helmet does — you need to fasten it. Otherwise, it will fall off when you need it most.

Other sports require eye protection, mouthguards, pads, wrist, elbow, and knee guards, and a protective cup (for boys only). And don't forget your feet. Cleats are worn in football, baseball, softball, and soccer. These shoes have special rubber or plastic points on the soles to help your feet grip the ground when you run around.

Talk with your parents or your coach to know what gear you need. Then wear that gear whenever you're practicing or playing.

### Warm Up

It's not a good idea to just bolt on to the field and start playing. You shouldn't even start stretching until you're a little warmed up. So take a light jog to get loosened up and ready to play.

### Know the Rules of the Game

Traffic lights at intersections help prevent crashes between the many cars and trucks that drive on the roads together. This works because drivers know the rules and follow them — at least most of the time. It's the same way with sports.

When players know the rules of the game — what's legal and what's not — fewer injuries happen. You and the other players know what to expect from each other. For instance, you know that in soccer you can't come from behind, crash into a player's legs, and steal the ball. It's legal — and safer — to go after the ball rather than the player.

With sports that use plays, it helps to understand the plays and what your role is in each one. Being where you're supposed to be can help you stay out of harm's way, too.

### Watch Out for Others



**The Secret of RICE**

**RICE is a way of remembering how to treat a sports injury. Take these steps to keep down the swelling, feel less pain, and speed healing:**

- Rest whatever body part is hurt.**
- Ice - Use it where it hurts.**
- Compression - Wrap the body part with a bandage.**
- Elevate the injured part. In other words, raise it up on a pillow.**

Some rules don't have anything to do with scoring points or penalties. Some rules are just about protecting other people and being courteous. For instance, in baseball or softball, the batter can't fling the bat after hitting the ball and heading for first base. He or she must drop it so that it doesn't hit anyone. Likewise, a diver would make sure that the pool was clear before diving in. Otherwise, he or she might land on someone else.

One way you can watch out for others is to communicate on the field. For instance, a baseball player in the outfield might yell "I got it" to avoid a collision with another outfielder.

Listening to your coach during a game also can help keep you safe. It's also good to just be courteous, like telling someone his or her shoe is untied. Check your shoes, too!

## **Don't Play When You're Injured**

This is a really important one. If you love sports, it's tempting to get right back in the game, even after an injury. But playing when you're hurt — or before an injury has had a chance to fully heal — is a bad idea. It can lead to an even worse injury, one that might sideline you for a long time.

Be honest with parents and coaches if you've been hurt. See a doctor for your injuries, when necessary, and follow his or her advice about how and when to return to practice and play.

Now you know what kids need to know about staying safe. Hopefully, if you follow rules 1, 2, 3, and 4, you won't need number 5. Or at least not quite as often!

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