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Sports Training for Youth Athletes: How Much is Too Much?

CHILDREN TODAY ARE BECOMING VERY INVOLVED IN SPORTS AT A YOUNG AGE, WITH MANY PLAYING ON MULTIPLE SPORTS TEAMS PER YEAR. WHILE WE WANT OUR YOUTH TO BE ACTIVE AND HEALTHY, TRAINING TOO MUCH COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT. FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG ATHLETES, THEIR CHILDREN'S HEALTH IS THEIR NUMBER-ONE PRIORITY. WHEN RESEARCH SURFACED THAT STRENUOUS TRAINING IN JUST ONE SPORT COULD LEAD TO SERIOUS INJURIES, MANY WERE LEFT WONDERING: "HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?"

Here is the new rule of thumb for children who practice sports, according to sports medicine researchers at the [Loyola University Medical Center](#) and [Lurie Children's Hospital](#) in Chicago: **Don't spend more hours than your age in training during a given week.** This advice is based on a study conducted among 1,206 athletes, ages eight to 18, who were given physical examinations for sports injuries between 2010 and 2013. Of the 859 injuries documented, 564 were due to overuse, and 139 of these were serious, including stress fractures, elbow ligament injuries, and damaged cartilage and bone. Serious injuries such as these can require six months or longer for a full recovery.

According to this data, youth athletes who play a sport for more hours than their age per week were 70 percent more likely to incur serious [overuse injuries](#) than other types of injuries. With growing pressure to specialize at increasingly young ages, the results of this study are an important reminder that keeping a child healthy and injury-free far outweighs any perceived competitive advantage derived from excessive training. Plus, the importance of the "fun factor" in playing sports should not be underestimated, and specializing too soon takes that away.



In summary, remember these tips to keep your young athletes healthy:

- Encourage children to participate in wide variety of sports and activities. Discourage specialization before adolescence.
- Make sure that your athletes participate in cross training and don't spend more hours than their age in years each week playing and training for one sport.
- Learn how to identify and seek appropriate treatment for commonly encountered overuse injuries such as stress fractures and ligament injuries.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

[Idea Fit](#)

[Stop Sports Injuries](#)