



**STOP
SPORTS
INJURIES**

SPORTS TIPS

SOFTBALL INJURY PREVENTION

Softball injuries in young athletes are on the rise and nearly as frequent as baseball injuries, but they generally result in less time lost to competition. These injuries most commonly involve the back, shoulder, forearm, wrist, and hand. Pitchers are not more prone to injury than position players; catchers and infielders have similar injury rates. However, pitcher injuries differ from position player injuries because pitchers use a windmill motion that places unique demands on the back, neck, shoulder, forearm, and wrist.

WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON OVERUSE INJURIES IN SOFTBALL?

For pitchers, the most common overuse injuries are shoulder tendinitis (inflammation of the tendon), back or neck pain, and elbow, forearm, and wrist tendinitis. For catchers, back and knee problems in addition to overhead throwing shoulder problems are the most common. For other position players, overhead shoulder and sometimes elbow problems predominate.

SOFTBALL

HOW CAN OVERUSE SOFTBALL INJURIES BE PREVENTED?

Overuse injuries are preventable. Some tips to keep young athletes in the game for life include:

- Warm up properly by stretching, running, and easy, gradual throwing.
- Rotate playing other positions besides pitcher.
- Concentrate on age-appropriate pitching.
- Adhere to pitch count guidelines (see tables).
- Avoid pitching on multiple teams with overlapping seasons.
- Flexibility of pitchers needs to be the focus during the season rather than strengthening.
- Don't pitch with pain, and see a doctor if the pain persists for a week.
- Don't pitch more than two consecutive days until age 13, and then no more than three days in a row.
- Don't play year-round.
- Radar Guns should only be used during competition for best pitch of speed vs. change up (ages 15+).
- Communicate regularly about how your arm is feeling and if there is pain or fatigue.
- Develop skills that are age appropriate.
- Emphasize control, accuracy, and good mechanics.
- Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if there are any concerns about injuries or prevention strategies.
- Return to play only when clearance is granted by a health care professional.

Maximum Pitch Counts

Age	Pitches/Game	Pitches/Day Days 1 & 2	Pitches/Day Day 3
8–10	50	80	0
10–12	65	95	0
13–14	80	115	80
15–over	100	140	100

REST PERIODS

Once girls begin to play competitively, they often play two games per day on two or three consecutive days. Two days of rest for pitchers is essential to prevent injuries. Additional guidelines include:

Girls < 12 years - only 2 days of consecutive pitching
Girls > 13 years - only 3 days of consecutive pitching

Rest means no live pitches, including batting practice. Pitchers may need to 'loosen up' with a flexibility routine on the second rest day and can participate in hitting and field drills.

HOW IS AN OVERUSE ELBOW OR SHOULDER INJURY TREATED?

The most obvious treatment for overuse is rest, especially from the activity that created the injury. Ice is also used to reduce soreness and inflammation, and Ibuprofen can be taken to help with any pain. If symptoms persist, it is critical that a rehabilitation professional or physician be contacted, especially if there is a lack of full motion. Unlike baseball injuries, most softball overuse injuries do not require surgery, but the care by a professional is advised, especially if pain persists or the injury recurs. Under some circumstances, surgery may be necessary to correct a problem. After a time loss injury, a return to play throwing program should be used (see references).

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BASEBALL INJURIES

Injuries in young athletes are on the rise, but elbow and shoulder injuries in children are on the verge of becoming an epidemic. Thousands of children are seen each year complaining of elbow or shoulder pain. Damage or tear to the ulnar collateral ligament (UCL) is the most common injury suffered and is often caused by pitchers throwing too much. This ligament is the main stabilizer of the elbow for the motions of pitching. When it becomes damaged, it can be difficult to repair and rehabilitate.

HOW IS AN ELBOW OR SHOULDER INJURY DIAGNOSED?

If a young athlete is throwing too hard, too much, too early, and without rest, a serious elbow or shoulder injury may be on the horizon. If the athlete complains of elbow or shoulder pain the day after throwing, or movement of the joint is painful or restricted compared to the opposite side, see a physician familiar with youth sports injuries immediately.



BASEBALL

HOW CAN OVERUSE BASEBALL INJURIES BE PREVENTED?

Overuse injuries — especially those related to the UCL and shoulder — are preventable. Some tips to keep you in the game throughout your life include:

- Warm up properly by stretching, running, and easy, gradual throwing
- Rotate playing other positions besides pitcher
- Concentrate on age-appropriate pitching
- Adhere to pitch count guidelines, such as those established by Little League Baseball (See tables)
- Avoid pitching on multiple teams with overlapping seasons
- Don't pitch with elbow or shoulder pain, if the pain persists, see a doctor
- Don't pitch on consecutive days
- Don't play year-round
- Never use a radar gun
- Communicate regularly about how your arm is feeling and if there is pain
- Develop skills that are age appropriate
- Emphasize control, accuracy, and good mechanics
- Master the fastball first and the change-up second, before considering breaking pitches
- Speak with a sports medicine professional or athletic trainer if you have any concerns about injuries or prevention strategies

Maximum Pitch Counts

Age	Pitches/Game
7–8	50
9–10	75
11–12	85
13–16	95
17–18	105

Source: Little League Baseball

Rest Periods Required

Ages 7–16	Ages 17–18	Required # of Rest Pitches
61+	76+	3 calendar days
41–60	51–75	2 calendar days
21–40	26–50	1 calendar day
1–20	1–25	None

Source: Little League Baseball

Age Recommended for Learning Various Pitches

Pitch	Age
Fastball	8 ± 2
Slider	16 ± 2

Change-up	10 ± 3
Forkball	16 ± 2
Curveball	14 ± 2
Knuckleball	15 ± 3
Screwball	17 ± 2

Source: From work by James R. Andrews, MD, and Glenn S. Fleisig, PhD

HOW IS AN OVERUSE ELBOW OR SHOULDER INJURY TREATED?

The most obvious treatment for overuse is rest, especially from the activity that created the injury. Ice is also used to reduce soreness and inflammation. Ibuprofen can be taken to help with any pain. If symptoms persist, it is critical that a physician be contacted, especially if there is a lack of full-joint motion. An examination and radiographs should be done. An MRI scan may also be helpful.

Usually a simple “rest cure” approach will not be enough, because even though it allows symptoms to subside, it also creates loss of muscle bulk, tone, flexibility, and endurance. Once pain is gone and full motion is present, a throwing rehabilitation program can start.

Under some circumstances, surgery may be necessary to correct a problem. Overuse and stress related problems can affect growing parts of bone, not just the soft tissue (muscles, tendons, and ligaments). If the condition is not treated, it could cause deformity of the limb and permanent disability. The athlete should return to play only when clearance is granted by a health care professional.

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Little League Baseball. www.littleleague.org/Assets/old_assets/media/pitchcount_faq_08.pdf

American Sports Medicine Institute. www.asmi.org

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