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On The Canal

September 2005



Appropriate Medical Care for Adolescent Athletes
Keith Loud, M.D.
Akron Children's Hospital

The beginning of the school year means the return of many middle- and high-school student-athletes to their chosen competitive sports. These activities can increase fitness, health, and wellness; teach valuable life skills and lessons; improve self-esteem; and create lifelong friendships and great memories. Unfortunately, participation in sports can also result in injuries, both minor and major.

Recognizing this risk, in 1998 the American Medical Association (AMA) called on all organizations that sponsor athletic programs, school boards, and local boards of health to establish athletic medical units (AMU) to ensure the health and safety of their participants. More recently, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) spearheaded a coalition of some 17 professional societies – including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), and American Medical Society for Sports Medicine (AMSSM) – to more thoroughly define what constitutes appropriate care for athletes in secondary school, club, and youth sports.

The consensus recommendation of the task force is that all organizations that sponsor athletic programs for this population should establish an athletic health care team (AHCT) whose responsibilities include:

1. Developing injury and illness prevention strategies by...
2. Determining the individual's readiness to participate, which includes ensuring a pre-participation evaluation (PPE) conducted by qualified medical personnel.
3. Promoting safe and appropriate practice, competition, and treatment facilities.
4. Advising on the selection, fit, function, and maintenance of athletic equipment.
5. Developing and implementing a comprehensive emergency action plan.
6. Establishing protocols regarding environmental conditions, such as heat, cold, and lightning.
7. Providing for on-site recognition, evaluation, and immediate treatment of injury and illness, with appropriate referrals.
8. Facilitating rehabilitation and reconditioning of athletic injuries.
9. Providing for psychosocial consultation and referral of athletes dealing with stress, burn-out, or eating disorders.
10. Providing scientifically sound and accurate nutritional counseling and education.

The AHCT should have a physician medical director, but the various functions of the team can be best coordinated on-site by an NATA-certified athletic trainer (ATC) licensed by the State of Ohio. Parents who want the best for their children should ask the coaches, principals, league presidents, and school boards about their athletic health care plans and advocate for ATCs in all settings. The medical professionals at SportsHealth & Rehab Center can fill out the other roles of the AHCT. Such a well-structured team can not only help return young athletes to their chosen activities more swiftly and safely after injury, but also prevent those injuries in the first place. More detailed information on Appropriate Medical Care for Secondary School Aged Athletes (AMCSSAA) or on athletic training in general can be found on the National Athletic Trainers' Association website at www.nata.org.

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Health Update

:Take the Test! Your Fitness Personality Profile



Joseph Congeni, M.D.
Akron Children's Hospital

Make an "X" in the circle on each line that best represents where you place yourself in relation to the characterizations at either end of the line.

Strongly
Moderately
In between
Moderately
Strongly

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Social

I love to be with people, to interact, to do things with others. I don't enjoy doing things by myself.

Spontaneous

I enjoy doing things on the spur of the moment. I am very spontaneous. I tire easily from routines.

Internally Motivated

I am 100% self-motivated, I have exceptionally strong willpower. I don't rely on others for support.

Competitive

I enjoy competitive games. I perform better when I compete. Competition makes it fun.

Aggressive

I am a forceful, assertive person. I take action. I won't let things get in my way. I make sure my needs are met.

Focused

It's easy for me to concentrate and stay focused on task. I enjoy getting absorbed in what I am doing.

Risk Seeking

I am a thrill seeker. I love adventure. I am willing to take big risks in order to do things that appeal to me.

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Nonsocial

I prefer doing things alone. I enjoy solitude. I find social interaction tiring.

Controlled

I like to plan and to feel in control. I want to know what's coming next. I enjoy routines. I don't like surprises.

Externally Motivated

I need support to do hard things. Self-rewards and social encouragement help me stay committed.

Noncompetitive

I avoid competitive situations. Competing makes me feel uncomfortable and I don't perform well. I rarely enjoy competition.

Non-aggressive

I am easygoing and relaxed, maybe even passive about meeting my needs. I dislike aggression and avoid confrontations.

Unfocused

I am easily distracted. My mind wanders. I prefer doing lots of things at the same time. I have difficulty staying with the same task.

Risk Avoiding

I avoid risks. I would rather be safe than sorry, even if that means not doing things that appeal to me. I am a careful person.

The Seven Psychosocial Styles

Sports medicine practitioners can gauge patient interests by administering a personality profile that uses a Likert scale. One possible scaling method is based on seven psychosocial dimensions that are described below:

- 1) **Sociability** is the degree to which an individual prefers social interaction over solitary pursuits. This dimension is similar to measures on introversion and extroversion.
- 2) **Spontaneity** is the extent to which an individual lives in an intuitively guided, open manner whereby change and spur-of-the-moment happenings are welcomed, rather than emphasizing high levels of control and predictability in life and avoiding situations that are highly changeable.
- 3) **Self-motivation** is the degree to which an individual exhibits high levels of determination and will-power, as opposed to requiring external supports and reinforcement to adhere to challenging activities or life endeavors.
- 4) **Aggressiveness** is the extent to which an individual behaves or interacts in strong, forceful highly assertive ways that may border on aggression, rather than behaving in a gentle, non-aggressive, or perhaps even passive manner.
- 5) **Competitiveness** is the extent to which an individual enjoys and pursues competitive engagements, as contrasted with an avoidance of competition coupled with a preference for noncompetitive, solitary or collaborative pursuits.
- 6) **Mental Focus** is the degree to which an individual demonstrates a high ability to concentrate or focus and prefers activities in which the mind is absorbed in one activity. On the other end of the scale is an individual who is easily distractible or prefers high levels of stimulation and multiple, simultaneous engagements.
- 7) **Risk Taking** is the extent to which an individual engages in risky behaviors, pursues adventure, or can be characterized as a thrill-seeker. The opposite personality type is cautious, risk avoiding, and highly concerned with safety and security.

To see what type of activities you would enjoy the most, check out the Fitness Personality Profile insert!!



The Importance of Stretching

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Stretching is often nothing more than an after-thought for athletes, usually performed briefly before a practice or competition to "loosen up." Sometimes the athlete may even "stretch down" a little after completion of the workout. As a physical therapist, very often I am asked the proper way to stretch. Depending on the sport and the body part in question, there are always many different safe and effective stretches that can be used. Once you know which stretches are going to be the most beneficial there are a couple important factors to keep in mind. First, consider why it is that you are stretching. Are you trying to increase your overall flexibility, improve your performance, prevent injury, or simply warm up for a contest or practice?

If you are looking to warm up, stretching "cold" is not your best bet. You will first want to perform an easy activity at a slow pace like jogging, stationary biking, or even some walking for 5 or 6 minutes to get your heart-rate up and your blood flowing. At this point muscles are ready to be stretched, and stretching after this is done will greatly increase the benefit you will receive during the practice or event. I tell runners beginning a long run to begin slowly and once they reach a traffic light or a street that they have to wait to cross, stop and stretch for 5-10 minutes before continuing the run at a faster pace.

Keep in mind that increasing flexibility can certainly decrease the potential for injury and impact performance in a positive manner. Stretching briefly before and after practices and events will probably not improve your flexibility significantly. To really improve flexibility, stretching must become a priority and performed throughout the day. This can depend on the person but I suggest between 3 and 5 times a day is a good number with which to start. I stress that the frequency of stretching is more important than the intensity of the stretch.

Stretching should be felt as, at most, mild discomfort, but never pain. Traditionally prolonged holds are used with 3 to 5 reps being held for 30 to 60 seconds each, although there are some recent studies which suggest that quicker, repeated movements may be just as effective if not more effective (for example, 10 to 15 reps with a 1 to 2 second hold time). Either way, remember what is important is the amount of time the muscle is in the stretched or "end-range" position. In this way you stress the muscle in a healthy way and the muscle responds over time by growing longer. The result is increased flexibility and, hopefully for the athlete, injury-free and better performances.