

## Chiropractors Offer Tips to Keep Your Young Athlete Healthy and Fit

by The American Chiropractic Association

In today's age of health and fitness, more and more kids are involved in sporting activities. Although being part of a football, soccer or Little League team is an important rite of passage for many kids, parents and their children could be overlooking the importance of proper nutrition and body conditioning needed for preventing injuries on and off the playing field.

"The majority, if not all, sports are good, provided that the child prepares appropriately," says Dr. Carl Heigl, president of the American Chiropractic Association's Council on Sports Injuries and Physical Fitness. "Without proper preparation, playing any sport can turn into a bad experience. There are structural and physical developmental issues that need to be taken into consideration before children undertake certain sports."

Highly competitive sports such as football, gymnastics and wrestling follow rigorous training schedules that can be potentially dangerous to an adolescent or teenager.

The best advice for parents who have young athletes in the family is to help them prepare their bodies and to learn to protect themselves from sports-related injuries before they happen.

"Proper warm up, stretching and weight-lifting exercises are essential for kids involved in sports, but many kids learn improper stretching or weight-lifting techniques, making them more susceptible to injury," says Dr. Steve Horwitz, an ACA member from Silver Spring, Maryland, and former member of the U.S. Summer Olympics medical team. "Parents need to work with their kids and make sure they receive the proper sports training."

"Young athletes should begin with a slow jog to warm up the legs and arms and stretch all the major muscle groups," says Dr. Horwitz. "Kids involved in football, baseball, gymnastics and swimming should develop a routine that includes strengthening exercises for the abdomen, the low-back muscles, arms and shoulders."

Proper nutrition and hydration are also extremely vital. "A student athlete may need to drink eight to ten 8-ounce glasses of water for proper absorption. Breakfast should be the most important meal of the day. Also, eating a healthy meal before and after practice or a game allows for proper replenishment and refuels the body," adds Dr. Horwitz.

Young athletes today often think they are invincible. The following tips can help ensure your child does not miss a step when it comes to proper fitness, stretching, training and rest that the body needs to engage in sporting activities.