

Protecting Kids on the Field and Court

Sports and other physical activities can help kids stay healthy and physically fit, but they also can result in injuries, such as scrapes and sprains.

Here are some steps parents can take to treat their children's minor sports injuries.

Scrapes and cuts

When a child gets a scrape or cut, the blood flow can make even a minor cut look like an emergency.

A minor cut should stop bleeding after a few minutes. To treat it, press a clean, soft cloth against the wound for several minutes and raise the injured part to stop the bleeding, advises the American Academy of Family Physicians. Then clean the area with warm water. Use mild soap around the edges of the wound to clean dirt and debris off the surrounding skin.

After the bleeding has stopped, place a small amount of an antibacterial cream or ointment on the wound and apply a clean bandage. Change the dressing periodically.

Strains and sprains

Muscle strains and sprains may be difficult to assess because the damage is on the inside. Generally, a strain will appear bruised, and pain, soreness, and swelling can develop several hours afterward, according to the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. With a sprain, the injured area usually swells immediately. Your child may feel acute pain. A sprain can take weeks to heal and can feel similar to a broken bone.

If you suspect your child has a sprain or strain, immediately take away any pressure on the injured part. If a foot is sprained or strained, for instance, don't allow your child to walk on that foot.

For general treatment, follow the RICE rule: Rest the injured part; apply ice or cold compresses several times a day to reduce swelling; have the child wear a bandage or splint to compress the area and prevent swelling; and elevate the injured part so it's above the heart.

See your child's health care provider if the sprain causes more than mild pain.

Relieving the pain

To ease the pain of a sports injury, you can give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen. Both are generally safe, with few side effects, when given in the correct dosage. Both types of pain relievers come in forms children can take more easily, such as liquids or chewable pills.

Preventing injury

Take the following steps to reduce your child's risk for injury:

- Schedule an annual physical for the child before he or she participates in sports.
- Make sure your child wears appropriate safety gear that fits properly. For instance, he should wear a helmet when playing football or hockey.
- Be sure your child's coaches are trained in basic first aid.
- Don't pressure your child to compete above his or her level. If you put a child in a situation he or she isn't ready for, you can increase the risk for injury.