

# BASEBALL SAFETY

## A GUIDE TO INJURY PREVENTION

SPORTS  
MEDICINE CENTER

TEXAS  
SCOTTISH RITE HOSPITAL  
FOR CHILDREN

### OVERUSE INJURIES IN BASEBALL

Early specialization and playing the same sport year-round have led to an increase in overuse injuries across all youth sports. Overuse injuries occur when performing a repetitive motion without sufficient rest. In baseball, the most common overuse injuries are Little League elbow and Little League shoulder. In both instances, resting the arm appropriately can reduce an athlete's risk of significant injury.

#### **Little League Elbow**

With too much throwing, a young athlete may experience pain on the inner side of the forearm and elbow near the growth plate. The athlete also may feel pain on the outside or back of the elbow from repeated compression within the elbow joint.

#### **Little League Shoulder**

Repetitive throwing can cause damage to the humerus, the upper arm bone, and the rotator cuff, the soft tissue that helps rotate the shoulder. This can result in stress at the growth plate in the humerus. The stress leads to pain and, in extreme cases, can change the shape of the bone.



**If an athlete complains of elbow or shoulder pain after throwing or while moving the joint, or has restricted motion in the joint compared to the opposite arm, the athlete should be removed from throwing, and a sports medicine specialist should be consulted.**

### **WILL MY CHILD NEED TOMMY JOHN SURGERY?**

Many people are familiar with Tommy John surgery because it is frequently seen in collegiate and professional athletes. This procedure is for significant instability in the elbow caused by major damage to the ulnar collateral ligament [UCL] that occurs with overuse or with an abrupt, traumatic injury. Fortunately, young athletes often respond well without surgery if the problem is recognized early and treated appropriately with rest from throwing. Early warning signs of a UCL injury include pain on the inner side of the elbow that gets worse with throwing.



### OTHER COMMON BASEBALL PROBLEMS

#### **Concussions**

In baseball, athletes are at risk of being struck by a high-speed ball in the head. Most athletes who suffer a concussion do not lose consciousness. An athlete with any symptoms or change in behavior, thinking, or physical functioning after a blow to the head or body should be suspected of having a concussion and removed from play immediately.

#### **Ankle Injuries**

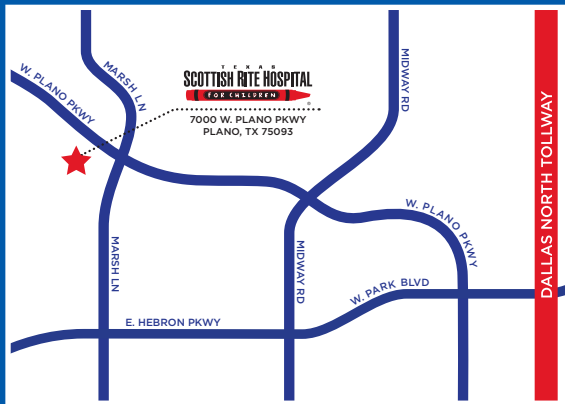
Lateral ankle sprains are common in many sports. In baseball, they may occur while sliding into or rounding a base. Mild ankle sprains are treated with RICE (Rest, Ice, Compression and Elevation). More severe sprains or the inability to bear weight may require an X-ray and evaluation by a sports medicine specialist.

The Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children (TSRHC) Sports Medicine Center is a comprehensive practice specializing in the treatment of sports-related conditions and injuries in young and growing athletes. The center offers a complete team of operative and non-operative physicians, nurse practitioners, nurses, physical therapists, medical assistants and athletic trainers – all working closely together to provide the best care for each patient.

The TSRHC Sports Medicine Center is a division of Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children.

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# PREVENTING BASEBALL INJURIES

## PREPARE

Before games and practices, take time to warm up by stretching and jogging. Rather than focus on one area, a stretching routine should include muscles in the arms, legs and trunk. After stretching, begin throwing with low intensity and gradually increase speed, always maintaining proper form. Continue to stretch, even on rest days. Increasing the flexibility of muscles in the elbow and shoulder can decrease the likelihood of injury.

## REST

Coaches, parents, and players in all positions should follow the pitch count and rest guidelines established by Little League™ Baseball:

### Pitch Counts

Age	Pitches Per Day
17-18	105
13-16	95
11-12	85
9-10	75
7-8	50

### Mandatory Rest

Ages 14 and Under	Ages 15-18	Mandatory Rest Requirement
66+	76+	4 days
51-65	61-75	3 days
36-50	46-60	2 days
21-35	31-45	1 day
1-20	1-30	No requirement

\*Source: Little League™ Baseball

Athletes must rest their throwing arm. The following are tips for achieving adequate rest:

- Do not pitch when fatigued
- Follow pitch count guidelines.
- Do not pitch on consecutive days.
- Do not pitch on multiple teams that have overlapping seasons.
- Rotate playing multiple positions other than pitcher and catcher.
- Take a season or a couple months off from baseball instead of playing year-round.

## DEVELOP AGE APPROPRIATE SKILLS

Emphasize proper form and good throwing mechanics, focusing on control and accuracy before power. With pitching, first master the fastball and then the change-up. Limit breaking pitches until the recommended age. Follow the table below for general recommendations for learning pitches:

## COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND REGULARLY

An athlete should talk frequently with coaches and parents about how the arm is feeling and if there is pain. An athlete should not throw with elbow or shoulder pain. If pain persists, a sports medicine specialist should be consulted.

### Age Recommended for Learning Various Pitches

Pitch	Age
Fastball	8
Change-up	10
Curveball	14
Knuckleball	15
Slider	16
Forkball	16
Splitter	16
Screwball	17

\*Source: USA Baseball Medical and Safety Advisory Committee Pitching Guidelines