

Sports Training

Are you doing too much?

Answer these questions before you read this text:

- 1 How many hours per week do you train?
- 2 Is it too much or too little?

Kids are starting playing sports at a younger age and training harder. The pressure to win is very strong. Sometimes, the trophies are bigger than the little athletes who won them! With all this competition, the pressure to perform can be difficult for a lot of teens.

The recipe for winning is simple: repetition, repetition, repetition – whether it is serving a tennis ball, pitching a baseball, or performing a figure-skating move. Overtraining happens when the athlete is required to do too much – either physically or mentally, or both.

It is important that teen sports programs are balanced to avoid overtraining. Coaches, parents and the athlete herself need to be sensitive to changes in the athlete's performance and attitude toward a sport that may suggest that she is training too hard.

Here are some signs of overtraining:

- The athlete starts to get slower times in distance sports such as running, cycling, and swimming.
- The athlete is not motivated to practice.
- The athlete gets **tired** easily.
- The athlete becomes more irritable and doesn't want to cooperate with teammates.

Unfortunately, when a parent or coach is confronted with signs of overtraining, they don't recognize it as "overtraining" and they think that the athlete is just **giving up** too easily. Usually their reaction is the worst one possible: to push the young athlete harder.

Training too much can also lead to **injuries** in which actual damage to the bones and soft tissues occurs because the body can't recover from the demands of the repetitive physical activity.

How much is O.K.?

As a general rule, teens shouldn't train for more than 18-20 hours a week. If a teen is engaged in elite competition there may be pressure to train for longer – especially before a major event. Anytime a teen trains for longer than this recommended length of time she/he must be monitored by a qualified sports doctor. Any pain lasting more than two weeks is justification for a visit to the sports doctor.

It's also important to ensure that athletes and their coaches respect restrictions against excessive sports activity. For example, young baseball pitchers in Canada are not allowed to pitch more than seven **innings** a week. This recommendation is respected by most coaches but sometimes parents want their children to practise more. In general, young baseball players shouldn't perform more than 300 "throws" a week.

Can I train harder?

Increasing the frequency, duration, or intensity of training too quickly is one of the main causes of injury. To prevent injuries, athletes should follow the "10-percent rule." The rule refers to the amount a young athlete's training can be increased every week without risking injury. In other words, a teen running twenty minutes at a time four times a week can probably safely run twenty-two minutes four times a week the week after, an increase of 10 percent.

Here are some scenarios of “too much too soon”:

- The football player, who, after a summer of inactivity, goes to fall pre-season training camp without any physical preparation.
- The swimmer who normally trains at 3000 metres per day but then begins swimming 5000 metres a day for three consecutive days.
- The dancer who does twelve hours of classes per week and then suddenly starts training six hours per day, six days a week at a summer dance program.
- The gymnast, who, in the weeks before a major event, doubles his training time.

How hard should you train?

Make sure your sports coach is certified. Look out for the signs of overtraining, as well as the early signs of injuries themselves.

The goal when you practise sports is to do something you like, such as spending time with friends and staying fit!

Smart

Words

tired = having no energy

give up = to abandon

injury = harm or damage done or suffered

inning = a segment of a baseball game