What do you need to know about track and field injuries?

About 50 percent of young track and field athletes have some sort of injury. Over-use injuries are most common. Increasing knowledge and awareness about running is important. Athletes, along with coaches and parents, can help prevent injuries.

What are common track and field injuries?

- Muscle strains are pain from torn muscle fibers. This can happen anywhere in the leg.
- Shin splints can be caused by injury to muscles or may even be tiny stress fractures in the lower leg (tibia).
- Compartment syndrome is pain from lower leg swelling.
- Runner’s knee is knee pain from the way the knee cap (patella) and thigh bone (femur) work together.
- IT band syndrome is pain on the outside of the thigh or knee from tight muscles.
- Plantar fasciitis is pain on the bottom of the foot.
- Scrapes and “road rash” are often from falling.
- Blisters result from poor fitting shoes or clothing.

How can you prevent injuries?

Stretching is important before and after every practice or event:

- Include the calves (gastrocnemius/soleus), back of thigh (hamstrings), front of thigh (quadriceps), front of hip (hip flexors) and groin (hip adductors).
- Include dynamic stretches. These are gentle moving stretches. They are part of a whole body warm-up. Dynamic stretches prepare athletes for the event or sport practice.
- Include static stretches. These are non-moving holds for less than 30 seconds. Static stretches are for cool-down after the event or sport.

The right equipment is extremely important:

- Get fitted for the best shoe based on your foot and mechanics.
- Get special fitting for other equipment for your event.
- Do a safety check for all your equipment. Check this on a regular basis.

The athlete must have proper hydration and nutrition to perform:

- Hydrate 30 minutes before a practice or event. Drink water before, during and after activities.
- Only drink sports drinks if the practice or event lasts more than 90 minutes.
- Pay special attention to the nutritional needs for long distance running.

Every athlete’s training plan depends on the event. It’s important to rest properly:

- Have two days of rest or light workouts a week.
- Keep vigorous running workouts to no more than five a week. This includes race or game day.
- Keep increases in distance or speed to no more than 10 percent a week.

What should you do in the off-season?

Stay fit during the off-season:

- Start a training program about six to eight weeks before the season starts. Work on: flexibility, strength, endurance, agility and event-specific techniques.
- Set up a jump training and agility program.
- Practice activities with explosive, burst-like moves, including jumping, bounds and coming out of starting blocks.
- Be proactive in learning the right skills for specific track and field events, and learning how to run with good form.

What is the best way to warm up?

When your muscles are cold, injuries happen. Take time to warm-up and stretch. A full warm-up takes about 30 minutes. Here is a sample warm-up:

- Five to ten minutes of light cardiovascular work. Break a sweat!
- 15 minutes of gentle dynamic stretches.
- Five to ten minutes of sport-specific or activity-specific agility drills.

Recommended Daily Maximum Running Distance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;9 years old</td>
<td>3 km or 1.86 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-11 years old</td>
<td>5 km or 3.11 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14 years old</td>
<td>10 km or 6.21 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-16 years old</td>
<td>21.1 km or 13.1 miles (half marathon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 years old</td>
<td>30 km or 18.6 miles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 years old</td>
<td>42.2 km or 26.2 miles (full marathon)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This handout is for information purposes only. It does not replace medical advice from a qualified doctor or physical therapist. Cook Children’s Medical Center will not be responsible for any harm or injury resulting from interpretation of the materials.

Sports Performance Orthopedic Rehab Team Specialists
SPORTS
1-817-347-2925
cookchildrens.org/SPORTS

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