



As it seems to be doing earlier and earlier each summer, school is starting back up, and with it so are school sports! Practice and conditioning can be demanding on your pre-teen or adolescent athlete, not to mention the physical and mental stress that come into play when the clock ticks down to game day. Keeping young athletes safe has been at the forefront of parent and coaching concerns more than ever in recent years as severe injuries to professional athletes in various sports and the lasting consequences associated with those injuries have garnered national attention, creating a bit of an outcry for improvements in safety to be made. With new technological advances being made every day, equipment manufacturers are now revolutionizing their products to provide the highest possible level of safety. Regulating authorities are scrutinizing the rulebooks to see where subtle changes can be made that will help protect players without affecting the integrity of the game. What most parents don't realize is that they have an opportunity to do their part to help prevent future injuries as well, in a very different way. Here are some tips that can help an athlete to either prevent or recover from injury, from a young age and throughout their career:

Strengthening the Unsung Heroes

We've all heard the jokes about weightlifters "skipping leg day", creating a disproportionate physique that looks off-balance. This is a similar concept. Often the focus of conditioning is to strengthen the larger muscle groups: chest, shoulders, glutes, quads, hamstrings, abdominals. Believe me, those are important. Their development is crucial to being able to compete at a high level. The point here is that there are smaller, less-defined muscles that need to be strengthened as well if you want to be less injury-prone and those may go overlooked. Strengthening the small postural muscles in the hips, leg and ankles will help to improve balance and stability. Strengthening the deep neck flexors and muscles around the

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neck can not only help to prevent a concussion from occurring, but can also help the athlete to fare better in the event that they do suffer a concussion, as these muscles offer protection to the spine and brainstem.

This information can provide a starting point when talking to your doctor about which options might work best for your athlete's individual needs. Starting good habits at a young age will give them the best possible chance to stay healthy and succeed both now and in the future!



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