

# Social Fitness

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

In the quest for overall well-being, physical fitness often takes center stage, but the importance of social fitness should not be underestimated.

Social fitness refers to the effect of social interactions and connections on one's health and overall well-being. This dimension of wellness recognizes the profound influence of social relationships, community engagement and interpersonal connections on an individual's physical and mental health.

CBS News Health Watch identified social fitness as a major 2024 health trend, saying it is on the rise after years of pandemic-induced isolation and can be seen in the uptick of such sports as pickleball.

Teddy Savage, the national lead trainer at Planet Fitness told CBS News that pickleball "brings people together in social settings that allow them to have fun while getting a full-body workout. It's the connection between exercise and functional movement and the desire to connect socially

in community settings that make this one so magnetic."

## Examples of Social Fitness

Participating in group exercise classes, whether it's a dance class, yoga session or team sport, fosters a sense of camaraderie. The shared experience of working towards fitness goals with others enhances motivation and creates a supportive social environment.

Joining a walking or running group provides physical activity and a platform for social interaction. The shared routine of exercising together can strengthen social bonds and create a sense of accountability.

In the digital age, online fitness communities offer a unique form of social fitness. Virtual platforms connect individuals with shared fitness interests, allowing for the exchange of tips, encouragement and the celebration of milestones, fostering a sense of community.

Creating and participating in fitness challenges with



ROBERT KNESCHKE

friends or colleagues can turn physical activity into a social event. Whether it's a step-count challenge or a friendly competition, the social aspect adds an extra layer of enjoyment to the pursuit of fitness goals.

## Contribution to Better Health

Social fitness has a profound effect on mental health. Regular social interactions can reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness,

contributing to improved mental well-being. Engaging in physical activities with others releases endorphins, the body's natural mood lifters.

Exercising in a social setting often boosts motivation. The presence of others provides encouragement and accountability, making individuals more likely to stick to their fitness routines and achieve their health goals.

Social connections have been linked to stress reduction. Engaging in activities with others, especially those that involve physical movement, can serve as a stress-relieving outlet. The combination of social interaction and physical activity creates a holistic approach to stress management.

Beyond the mental and emotional benefits, social fitness can positively affect physical health. Regular

engagement in social physical activities contributes to cardiovascular health, improved muscle tone and increased flexibility.

## Socially Fit Lifestyles

Actively seek opportunities for social interactions, whether through group fitness classes, organized sports or community events. Prioritizing social connections can contribute to a more fulfilling and socially fit lifestyle.

Look for ways to merge social and physical activities. This could involve scheduling regular walks with friends, participating in team sports or organizing fitness-focused gatherings.

Leverage technology to enhance social fitness. Join online fitness communities, participate in virtual workout sessions or use fitness apps that connect individuals with similar goals.

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# Salty Dilemma

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Sodium, a mineral commonly found in salt, plays a crucial role in bodily functions.

The modern diet, however — often characterized by processed foods and excessive salt consumption — has led to an overabundance of sodium in many individuals' daily lives. Reducing sodium intake is increasingly recognized as a vital step toward promoting overall health and preventing various chronic conditions.

The World Health Organization reports that worldwide, almost all populations are consuming too much sodium, nearly double the recommended amounts. This can cause such problems as raised blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, strokes, gastric cancer, obesity, osteoporosis, Meniere's disease and kidney disease. They say that reducing sodium intake is one of the most cost-effective measures to improve health.

While sodium is essential for maintaining proper fluid balance, nerve function and muscle contractions, excessive intake can lead to health issues. The average daily sodium consumption in many societies far exceeds the recommended levels, primarily due to the prevalence of processed and restaurant-prepared foods.

## Benefits to Less Salt

One of the primary health benefits of reducing sodium intake is the positive effect on blood pressure. High sodium levels can lead to water retention, increasing blood volume and putting additional strain on the heart. By moderating sodium intake, individuals can contribute to maintaining healthy blood pressure levels and reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

When blood pressure remains consistently elevated due to high sodium levels, the heart has to work harder, leading to potential damage to the arteries and an increased risk of heart



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attacks and other cardiovascular issues.

The kidneys play a crucial role in maintaining sodium balance in the body. Excessive sodium can burden the kidneys, potentially leading to kidney damage or dysfunction over time.

High blood pressure, often linked to elevated sodium levels, is a major risk factor for strokes. Reducing sodium intake contributes to blood pressure management, thereby reducing the risk of strokes and associated

complications.

Sodium is closely tied to water balance in the body. Excessive sodium intake can lead to fluid retention, causing swelling and edema. By moderating sodium intake, individuals can mitigate these symptoms and promote a healthier fluid balance in the body.

## Tips for Reducing Sodium Intake

Opt for whole, unprocessed foods. Fresh fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains

are naturally low in sodium and contribute to a balanced and nutritious diet.

Be vigilant about reading food labels. Processed and packaged foods often contain high levels of hidden sodium. Choose products with lower sodium content and be aware of serving sizes.

Processed and convenience foods, including snacks, canned soups and frozen meals, tend to be high in sodium. Limiting the consumption of these items can significantly reduce overall sodium intake.

Cooking at home allows you to control the ingredients and salt levels in your meals. Experiment with herbs, spices and other flavorings to enhance taste without relying on excessive salt.

If you're accustomed to a high-sodium diet, consider gradually reducing salt in your recipes. This allows your taste buds to adjust, and over time, you may find that you need less salt to enjoy your meals.

# Tips to prevent pickleball injuries

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Pickleball has inspired millions of devotees. According to the Association of Pickleball Professionals, roughly 36.5 million individuals played pickleball in 2022, and 45 percent of players who participated in a YouGov study conducted between August 2021 and August 2022 indicated they planned to play more pickleball in the coming six months than they had in the previous six months.

Pickleball is thriving, and that's great news for those who love the game. Unfortunately, pickleball also has proven beneficial to orthopedic practices. A 2023 analysis from UBS estimated pickleball injuries could

cost Americans nearly \$400 million in 2023. Seniors are especially vulnerable to pickleball injuries, as a 2021 study published in the journal Injury Epidemiology found that 86 percent of emergency room visits related to pickleball injuries affected individuals 60 and older.

Injuries are a part of any sport, and pickleball is no different. Though there's no foolproof method to guarantee pickleball players don't get hurt playing the game they love, the following are some tips that can reduce injury risk.

- **Gear up.** Pickleball is a competitive sport, but there's a tendency among some players, particularly novices, to take a casual

approach to the game. Veteran players may know better, but anyone new to the game should be sure to wear the appropriate gear when playing. Athletic shoes with ample traction can reduce the likelihood that players will slip or fall. The right racket also can reduce

risk for elbow injuries. The sporting goods experts at Dick's Sporting Goods note that paddles should feature a light to medium weight, comfortable grip and a large sweet spot. The right paddle will be different for everyone, so novices are urged to speak to veteran

players for advice on which paddle might be best for them.

- **Embrace physical activity.** Pickleball can be a great workout, and players can reduce their injury risk by embracing physical activity even when they are

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# Alternative pain treatments

## BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

People who experience chronic pain are eager to find ways to manage it and many turn to alternative treatments. Acupuncture has been in use in some form for at least 2,500 years. Acupuncture involves inserting thin needles into specific points on the body. They are most often manipulated by hand, though some practitioners use heat or small electrical currents.

With its accelerated use, more insurance companies are starting to cover acupuncture services. Even Medicare covers its use for treat lower back pain as of 2020.

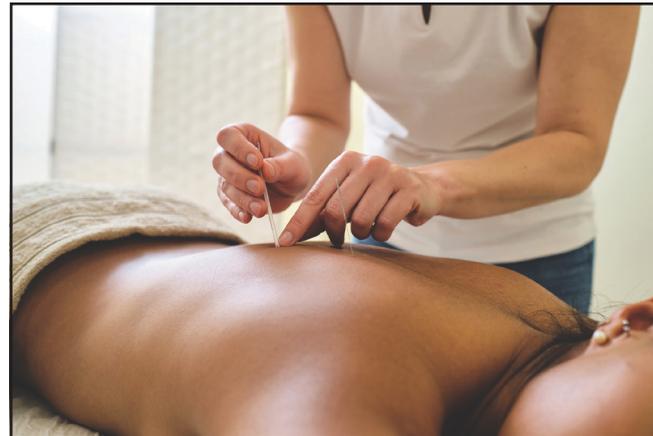
The Mayo Clinic explains that there are two approaches to acupuncture. Traditional Chinese Medicine uses it to balance to flow of energy or life force, which is known as chi or qi (chee), through the meridians in a person's body. The needles are inserted along the meridians to help re-balance energy flow. Western acupuncturists use needles to stimulate nerves, muscles and connective tissue to boost the body's natural painkillers.

## Acupuncture Research

Acupuncture is used in 103 of 129 countries that reported data, according to the National Institutes of Health. Scientists don't fully understand acupuncture, but they have learned a few things through research. It appears to affect nervous system function as well as having direct effect on the tissues where the needles are inserted, especially connective tissue.

The NIH reported that people with back pain, osteoarthritis and headaches continued to show beneficial effects of acupuncture for a year after the end of treatment. Acupuncture may help relieve joint pain associated with the drugs taken by people with breast cancer.

In addition to pain relief, there is some evidence that acupuncture helps relieve seasonal allergy symptoms, labor pain, dental pain, menstrual cramps, stress incontinence in women and nausea and vomiting associated with cancer treatment. It also helps relieve allergy symptoms but does not



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improve lung function.

## Acupuncture drawbacks

Find a qualified and licensed acupuncturist. There are few complications reported from acupuncture except where nonsterile needles were used or treatment was improperly delivered. When done wrong, acupuncture can cause infections, punctured organs and injury to the central nervous system.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration requires that acupuncture needles be sterile and used only once.

Side effects can include minor bruising or soreness at needle insertion sites.

Tell your provider if you have a bleeding disorder, are taking blood thinners or have a pacemaker. Also, acupuncture is thought to stimulate labor and could result in a premature delivery.

## Preparing for and Receiving Acupuncture

Seek recommendations from people you trust and your doctor. Ask how much the service will cost, what's involved and whether they accept your insurance.

Your provider is likely to have their own unique style. They may ask you questions about your symptoms and lifestyle. Before starting, they might examine parts of your body that hurt, what your tongue looks like, the color of your face and the characteristics of your pulse.

Sessions vary in length. You'll develop a treatment plan with your provider based on your condition. Sometimes plans involve one to two treatments a week and involve six to eight treatments, according to the Mayo Clinic.

You may be asked to undress and wear a gown or drape yourself with a towel or sheet. You'll lie on a padded table while thin needles are inserted at strategic points. Most people report little discomfort or say they don't feel it at all. Most treatments use five to 20 needles.

The provider may gently move or twirl the needles or apply heat or mild electrical pulses while the needles are in place, which can last for 10 to 15 minutes before they are removed.

## PICKLEBALL

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not playing. Leg exercises can help build lower body strength, but strength exercises that focus on the upper body also can reduce injury risk.

• **Loosen up before playing.** Taking the court

right after getting out of the car is a recipe for injury.

Arrive five to 10 minutes before a game and use that time to loosen up. A short walk and some subsequent stretches can help players make sure their bodies are not too tight to play. Some brief warm-up exercises and stretching can reduce muscle

tension and make the body less vulnerable to injury.

• **Hydrate before, during and after a game.** The experts at Johns Hopkins Medicine note that water cushions the joints, which helps athletes maintain their flexibility. Flexibility can reduce injury risk, particularly in a sport

like pickleball. The 2021 study published in Injury Epidemiology noted that 60 percent of pickleball injuries are sprains, strains or fractures. Remaining flexible can reduce athletes' risk for sprains and strains. Johns Hopkins recommends adults consume between six and 12

ounces of water for every 20 minutes of sports play and to drink between 16 and 24 ounces afterward.

Pickleball is wildly popular, even though pickleball injuries are common. Players can embrace various strategies to reduce their injury risk.

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# Overcome seasonal allergies

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Seasonal allergies crop up at certain times each year, particularly in spring and fall. In 2021, approximately 81 million people in the United States were diagnosed with seasonal allergic rhinitis, according to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America. The Canadian Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Foundation says between 20 and 25 percent of Canadians suffer from allergic rhinitis.

Tree and grass pollen are notable contributors to allergies, as is mold. Verywell Health says allergies can be worse in certain areas. In the U.S., certain areas of the East Coast have high rates of allergies, while cities on the West Coast tend to be less harsh on those with allergies.

Since allergies can make life uncomfortable, people want to know all they can do to overcome seasonal allergies. These strategies can help.

- **Know the pollen count.** Information is key,



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and knowing when pollen or mold counts are particularly high can help people take certain steps to avoid allergic reactions.

- **Close the windows.**

When pollen levels are high, closing windows to prevent breezes that can bring pollen inside a home can be an

effective strategy. You also can utilize a HEPA filter on the home's air conditioning system.

- **Remove clothes worn outdoors and shower to rinse pollen off of skin and hair.**

- **While it can reduce energy usage, hanging clothing to line dry during**

**high pollen counts can cause pollen to stick to freshly laundered items.**

- **Avoid gardening or other outdoor activities when pollen is high.** If you must be outdoors, wear a mask.

- **Try an antihistamine product that will reduce your body's reaction to the**

seasonal allergen. WebMD says butterbar as well as a plant-based Phleum pratense could be natural alternative antihistamine products.

- **Use a nasal rinse to clean allergens out of your nose.** This can help ease congestion and itching. Select sterile saline solutions or carefully follow directions for preparing rinses in neti pots.

- **Corticosteroid nasal sprays can improve nasal symptoms.** Speak with a doctor about how to use these products and how long to use them.

- **Consider allergy shots, also known as allergen immunotherapy.** These shots can help desensitize the body to common allergies by using very small amounts of allergens over time. Eventually the immune system will produce a reduced reaction to the allergen.

Allergies can be troublesome. However, various strategies can help to diminish the often unpleasant effects of seasonal allergies.

## Safe Food Handling

### BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA

Ensuring the safety of the food we consume begins right in our homes.

From proper storage to thorough cooking, adopting safe food handling practices is essential in preventing foodborne illnesses.

Foodborne illnesses, often caused by bacteria, viruses, parasites or toxins, can lead to discomfort, severe health issues or even life-threatening conditions. By following guidelines for safe food handling, individuals can safeguard their health and that of their loved ones.

Effective handwashing is the cornerstone of safe food handling. Hands can harbor bacteria and viruses, and proper hand hygiene

is crucial before and after handling food. Wash hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, ensuring that all surfaces, including fingertips and nails, are thoroughly cleaned.

Prevent cross-contamination by keeping raw meats, poultry, seafood and their juices separate from ready-to-eat foods. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw and cooked items, and avoid using the same platter for raw and cooked meats.

Refrigeration plays a vital role in inhibiting the growth of harmful bacteria. Keep perishable foods, such as meats, dairy products and leftovers, refrigerated at or below 40°F (4°C). Refrig-

erate leftovers promptly and consume them within recommended time frames to prevent bacterial growth.

Cooking food to the right internal temperature is crucial for eliminating harmful pathogens. Use a food thermometer to ensure

that meats, poultry and seafood reach their safe minimum internal temperatures. Ground meats should be cooked to at least 160°F (71°C), while poultry, including chicken and turkey, should reach 165°F (74°C).

When thawing frozen foods, use safe methods to avoid bacterial growth. Thawing in the refrigerator, under cold running water or in the microwave are recommended. Avoid thawing at room tempera-

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# Avoid infection with proper contact lens care



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Contact lenses provide a convenient means to improving vision. Although contact lenses may seem like a recent invention, they've been in the works for centuries. Leonardo da Vinci produced the first known sketches in 1508 that suggested the optics of the human eye could be altered by placing the cornea directly in contact with water. The ideas of da Vinci led to the development of the first contact lenses nearly 350 years later.

The first contact lenses covered all of the eye (the white [sclera] and the iris) and were made of heavy glass. Contacts have evolved over the years and most worn today are soft lenses largely made from silicone hydrogel.

As contacts sit directly on the eyes, it is important to avoid the introduction of foreign matter to the eye with careful hygiene and other practices. WebMD reports that those who wear contacts have a higher risk for keratitis, an infection of the cornea caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi, and rare parasites. It's also easier to catch conjunctivitis. Smart contact lens usage can help people avoid infections and other eye irritation. Contact wearers can follow these guidelines.

• **Wash hands before handling contacts.** Always wash and dry your hands before touching contact lenses to

avoid transferring microorganisms from your hands and fingers to the lenses.

• **Rub the lenses while cleaning.** The American Optometric Association says rubbing the lenses while cleaning them loosens the protein and bacteria that builds up. Even if the solution advertises "no rub," you should do it anyway.

• **Always use fresh solution.** Wash and store contacts in fresh, store-bought solution. Do not reuse solution, and never make homemade saline solution, which may not be sterile.

• **Consider daily lenses.** One way to cut down on the buildup of bacteria is to opt for daily lenses. These are individually packaged and are only worn for one day before being discarded, as opposed to weekly or monthly lenses.

• **Rest your eyes.** Whenever possible, give your eyes a chance to "breathe," so to speak. Skip the contacts if you are at home and will not be encumbered by wearing eyeglasses. When utilizing contacts, do not wear them longer than is prescribed for that type of lens. Do not sleep in contacts unless they are designed for overnight wear.

Care must be given to contact lenses to avoid eye infections and other harmful conditions.

## SAFE FOOD

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ture, as it allows bacteria to multiply rapidly.

Raw or undercooked eggs pose a risk of salmonella contamination. Use pasteurized eggs in recipes that call for raw or undercooked eggs, and avoid consuming dishes like homemade

Caesar salad dressing or eggnog made with raw eggs.

Regularly clean and sanitize kitchen surfaces, utensils and equipment to prevent the spread of bacteria. Use hot, soapy water to clean cutting boards, countertops and utensils, and consider using a sanitizing solution for an extra layer of protection.

Leftovers can be a

convenient and delicious option, but they require safe handling. Refrigerate leftovers promptly and consume them within 3-4 days. Reheat leftovers to at least 165°F (74°C) before consuming.

Ensure that everyone in the household is aware of safe food handling practices. Teach family members, including children, the

importance of handwashing, proper storage and safe cooking temperatures.

Choose fresh, high-quality produce and perishables from reputable sources. Check expiration dates on packaged goods, and inspect fruits and vegetables for signs of freshness. Proper storage

begins at the point of purchase.

Safe food handling at home is a shared responsibility that contributes to the well-being of individuals and their families. By incorporating these practices into daily routines, individuals can significantly reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.

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# Digital Health

**BY GREEN SHOOT MEDIA**

In an era where technology is seamlessly integrated into daily life, wearables have emerged as powerful tools for personal health management.

Several wellness publications have identified the growth of this technology as one of the top wellness trends of 2024.

These devices, equipped with advanced sensors and data analytics capabilities, offer individuals real-time insights into their health, facilitating proactive and informed decision-making. From fitness trackers to smartwatches and sleep monitoring devices utilizing support vector machines (SVM), wearables are transforming the landscape of health monitoring.

**Types of Wearables**

Fitness trackers are among the most popular wearables, designed to monitor physical activity and exercise. These devices use accelerometers and gyroscopes to track movement, providing data on steps taken, distance traveled and calories burned. By setting activity goals and receiving real-time feedback, users can tailor their exercise routines to meet personal health objectives, fostering a more active and healthy lifestyle.

Smartwatches have evolved beyond serving as mere extensions of smartphones. Equipped with heart rate monitors, GPS and fitness tracking capabilities, smartwatches offer comprehensive health insights. They enable continuous monitoring of vital signs, such as heart rate variability, providing a holistic view of cardiovascular health. Some advanced models even incorporate electrocardiogram (ECG) features for more in-depth heart health assessments.

Sleep plays a pivotal role in overall well-being, and wearables now offer



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sophisticated tools for monitoring and improving sleep quality. Some devices use SVM, a machine learning algorithm, to analyze sleep patterns. SVM-based sleep trackers collect data on movement, heart rate and even environmental factors, creating personalized sleep insights. By understanding sleep cycles, users can make informed adjustments to optimize sleep duration and quality.

For individuals managing diabetes or seeking to understand their glucose levels, continuous glucose monitors (CGMs) provide real-time data. These wearables use tiny sensors inserted under the skin to measure glucose levels throughout the day. By receiving continuous feedback, users can make informed decisions about dietary choices, insulin dosage and lifestyle modifications, enhancing diabetes management.

Stress-tracking wearables use various sensors,

including heart rate monitors and skin conductance sensors, to assess stress levels. These devices provide users with insights into their stress patterns and offer features like guided breathing exercises to promote relaxation. Understanding stress trends empowers individuals to implement stress-reduction strategies for better mental and physical health.

**Effect on Personal Health Management**

Wearable technology

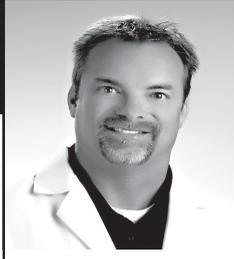
enables proactive health monitoring by providing real-time data on various health metrics. Users can identify trends, set goals and make timely adjustments to their lifestyle for improved overall health.

The personalized nature of wearable technology allows users to receive insights tailored to their unique health profiles. From activity recommendations to sleep optimization strategies, wearables offer individualized guidance for more effective health management.

Wearables serve as

powerful motivators for behavioral change. Real-time feedback and goal tracking encourage individuals to adopt healthier habits, leading to sustained improvements in fitness, sleep and overall well-being.

Wearables designed for specific health conditions, such as diabetes or heart health, empower individuals to actively manage their conditions. Continuous monitoring and data-driven insights enhance self-care and facilitate more informed discussions with healthcare professionals.



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# Making youth sports safer for athletes

## BY METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

Participating in youth sports can be a great way for children to develop various interpersonal skills and stay active. Routine physical activity is part of a healthy lifestyle, which can help reduce the rates of obesity and overweight among modern youths. However, participation in sporting activities is not without risk. It falls on coaches, leagues and parents to make youth sports as safe as possible for these young athletes.

According to Stanford Medicine Children's Health, more than 3.5 million children ages 14 and younger get hurt each year while playing sports or participating in recreational activities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports high school athletes account for an estimated two million injuries,

half a million doctor visits and 30,000 hospitalizations each year. A 2011 study of Canadian youth published in Science Direct found that 66 percent of injuries among young people between the ages of 12 and 19 were sports-related. In the face of such data, parents may be left wondering what can be done to reduce injuries.

## Cross train for overuse injury prevention

The Canadian Strength & Conditioning Association says overtraining may be one contributor to these injuries. Overuse injuries involve repetitive strain placed on bones, tendons and ligaments, which differ from acute injuries that occur during a traumatic event. A 2009 study from the American College of Sports Medicine found the number of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruc-



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tions performed on children between the ages of three and 20 in New York increased by 100 percent between 1990 and 2009. The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia says ACL tears in children are not typically common compared to all injuries they suffer. However, they are more prevalent among youths who participate in organized sports that involve a lot of running, jumping, twisting, and pivoting. Children need to take breaks from sports to

allow their bodies to recover and to incorporate variety into their activities through cross training to avoid repetitive strain on one area of the body. In addition, muscles that have had the chance to warm up are less vulnerable to overuse injuries.

## Use proper technique

It is essential that young athletes be schooled in the proper techniques when engaging in physical activity. Coaches should make sure that athletes are employing

the proper techniques before sending them into games.

## Get the proper equipment

Protective equipment, such as helmets, pads, shoes, and more, are vital for injury prevention and should never be overlooked.

## Listen to your body

Young athletes should not be advised to play through pain. Doing so can exacerbate any injuries and lead to more damage that may sideline an athlete for a long time, says Johns Hopkins Medicine. Less focus on being the best at all costs from coaches and parents may remove the pressure to play no matter what.

Although there is some risk of injury when playing sports, young athletes can reduce their chances of getting hurt if they are smart about sports play.

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