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New Mexico Foot & Ankle Centers

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 7

OCTOBER 2012

BACK-TO-SCHOOL SOCCER SEASON

Prime Time for Foot, Ankle Injuries

Parents and coaches should think twice before coaxing young, injury-prone soccer players to "play through" foot and ankle pain, according to the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons.

Skeletally immature kids, starting and stopping and moving side to side on cleats that are little more than moccasins with spikes—that's a recipe for foot and ankle sprains and worse.

Kids will play with lingering, nagging heel pain that, upon testing, turns out to be a stress fracture that neither they, their parents nor their coaches were aware of. By playing with pain, they can't give their team 100 percent and make their injuries worse, which prolongs their time out of soccer.

Occasionally, parents have to be shown x-rays of fractures before they'll take their kids out of the game. Stress fractures can be subtle—they don't always show up on initial x-rays.

Stress fractures, Achilles tendonitis, heel pain, ankle sprains, broken toes

Symptoms of stress fractures include pain during normal activity and when touching the area and swelling without bruising. Treatment usually involves rest and sometimes casting. Some stress fractures heal poorly and often require surgery, such as a break in the elongated bone near the little toe, known as a Jones fracture.

Constant running in soccer can place excessive stress on the foot. Pain from overuse usually stems

from inflammation, such as around the growth plate of the heel bone, more so than a stress fracture.

Kids growth plates are still open and bones are still growing and maturing—until they're about 13 to 16. Rest and, in some cases, immobilization of the foot should relieve that inflammation.

Achilles tendonitis and plantar fasciitis (heel pain caused by inflammation of the tissue extending from the heel to the toes) are other types of overuse injuries.

Quick, out-of-nowhere ankle sprains are also common to soccer.

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6 TIPS TO PROTECT KIDS IN FALL SPORTS

Every fall season, foot and ankle surgeons see an increase in ankle injuries among young athletes. Football, soccer and basketball are the sports most likely to lead to sprains, broken bones and other problems.

If your children are playing sports this fall, here are six tips to that could protect your

children from serious ankle injuries:

1. **Get ankle injuries treated right away.**

What seems like a sprain is not always a sprain; in addition to cartilage injuries, your son or daughter might have injured other bones in the foot without knowing it. Have a

qualified doctor examine the injury. The sooner rehabilitation starts, the sooner long-term problems like instability or arthritis can be pre-

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BACK-TO-SCHOOL SOCCER SEASON....CONTINUED

Ankle sprains should be evaluated by a foot and ankle surgeon to assess the extent of the injury. If the ankle stays swollen for days and is painful to walk or even stand on, it could be a fracture.

Collisions between soccer players take their toll on toes. When two feet are coming at the ball simultaneously, that ball turns into cement block and goes nowhere. The weakest point in that transaction is usually a foot, with broken toes the outcome. The toes swell up so much the player can't get a shoe on, which

is a good sign for young athletes and their parents: If they are having trouble just getting a shoe on, they shouldn't play.

Treat injuries immediately

If you think your child has suffered any sort of foot or ankle soccer injury, consult a foot and ankle surgeon right away.

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6 TIPS TO PROTECT KIDS....CONTINUED

-vented, and the sooner your child can get back into competition.

2. Have old sprains checked by a doctor before the season starts.

A medical check-up can reveal whether your child's previously injured ankle might be vulnerable to sprains, and could possibly benefit from wearing a supportive ankle brace during competition.

3. Buy the right shoe for the sport.

Different sports require different shoe gear. Players shouldn't mix baseball cleats with football shoes.



4. Children should start the season with new shoes.

Old shoes can wear down like a car tire and become uneven on the bottom, causing the ankle to tilt because the foot can't lie flat.

5. Check playing fields for dips, divots and holes.

Most sports-related ankle sprains are caused by jumping and running on uneven surfaces. That's why some surgeons recommend parents walk the field, especially when children compete in non-professional settings like public parks, for spots that could catch a player's foot and throw them to the ground. Alert coaching officials to any irregularities.

6. Encourage stretching and warm-up exercises.

Calf stretches and light jogging before competition helps warm up ligaments and blood vessels, reducing the risk for ankle injuries.



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