Tips for Preventing Baseball and Softball Injuries

To help your child avoid injuries while playing baseball or softball, follow these safety tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Consumer Product Safety Commission, and other sports and health organizations. (Note: These tips apply to adult ball players, too.)

- Before your child starts a training program or plays competitive baseball or softball, take him or her to the doctor for a physical exam. The doctor can help assess any special injury risks your child may have.
- Make sure your child wears all the required safety gear every time he or she plays and practices. Insist that your child wear a helmet when batting, waiting to bat, or running the bases. Helmets should have eye protectors, either safety goggles or face guards. Shoes with molded cleats are recommended (most youth leagues prohibit the use of steel spikes). If your child is a catcher, he or she will need additional safety gear: catcher's mitt, face mask, throat guard, long-model chest protector, and shin guards.
- If your child is a pitcher, make sure pitching time is limited. Little League mandates time limits and requires rest periods for young pitchers.
- Insist that your child warm up and stretch before playing.
- Teach your child not to play through pain. If your child gets injured, see your doctor. Follow all the doctor's orders for recovery, and get the doctor's OK before your child returns to play.
- Make sure first aid is available at all games and practices.
- Talk to and watch your child’s coach. Coaches should enforce all the rules of the game, encourage safe play, and understand the special injury risks that young players face. Make sure your child's coach teaches players how to avoid injury when sliding (prohibits headfirst sliding in young players), pitching, or dodging a ball pitched directly at them.
- Above all, keep baseball and softball fun. Putting too much focus on winning can make your child push too hard and risk injury.

Encourage your league to use breakaway bases. These bases, which detach when someone slides into them, can prevent many ankle and knee injuries in both children and adults. Leagues with players 8 years old and under should alter the rules of the game to include the use of adult pitchers or batting tees. Remember, you don't have to be on a baseball diamond to get hurt. Make sure your child wears safety gear and follows safety rules during informal baseball and softball games, too.