

Spine Care for Teen Athletes

TIPS FOR KEEPING TEENS ACTIVE AND HEALTHY

By Amy Thornley

Today's teens may be more sedentary and internet-focused than in years past, but that's not who Dr. Jaideep Chunduri is seeing. "In my practice, we're seeing kids who are very, very active, playing multiple sports throughout the year," he says. Chunduri is an orthopedic spine surgeon with Beacon Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine.

He's also treating more teens for back injuries than ever before. In his 13 years of practice, he has seen an increase in the number of teens coming to him with complaints of chronic back pain, sometimes for one to two years. "We're seeing more and more, just because kids are playing multiple sports and don't really have a chance to rest their back or rest their body. We're also pushing kids towards select sports, in which they play one sport year-round."

If your teen complains of back pain, don't just wait for the pain to go away or adopt the "play through the pain" mentality. "Any kind of pain when you're a teenager is abnormal," says Chunduri. Pain that lasts for a day or so and then goes away might be OK, but pain that occurs every time you complete a certain action, like hitting a ball, is cause for concern. "Back pain that keeps you from doing things is not normal," says Chunduri.

If pain occurs every day and lasts longer

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than six months, or if you experience back pain that interferes with daily activities like school or sport participation, seek out a sports medicine facility. Beacon prides itself on seeing and diagnosing patients quickly. Teen athletes are diagnosed using a combination of physical examination, X-rays and MRIs. Information is then shared among the doctors and specialists at Beacon so that your teen can be treated and get back on the field quickly.

For any athlete, especially teens, injury prevention is ideal. The key to preventing

back pain is a combination of flexibility and strength: flexibility in the hamstrings and strength in the core. Chunduri recommends sit-ups and planks for strengthening core, and encourages athletes to work on touching their toes. "All the muscles that surround your back, including hip flexors and trapezius muscles, need to be strong," says Chunduri. Don't wait until your back already hurts — start now to avoid pain later. ■