

Excellence in Young Athletes



Children's
Healthcare of Atlanta

10 Tips for Excellence in Young Athletes

1. **Footwear:** Make sure shoes fit well, are supportive and meet the needs of the sport. Remember that substance is more important than style. If possible, go to a good running/athletic shoe store with a well-trained staff, who are qualified to ensure a proper fit and answer questions. Running shoes need to be replaced every year or every 400 miles, whichever comes first.
2. **Nutrition:** Pre-event: eat complex carbohydrates (like pasta) the night before an event. Don't eat spicy foods or candy bars right before an event. A candy bar can be helpful before a sprint, but the resulting blood sugar spike and crash can decrease performance. Post-event: Eat a high carbohydrate meal or drink a sports drink after the event.
3. **Sleeping:** Develop and stick to a regular sleeping schedule.
4. **Be careful with nutritional supplements:** If used properly, protein powders will not hurt, but the body doesn't store protein. Working out is what builds muscle and strength. However, if an athlete has a protein-deficient diet (vegetarian), these [supplements](#) may help. Prior to using nutritional supplements, please consult your doctor.
5. **Avoid the common pitfalls for female athletes:** Young female athletes who over train and/or under eat can fall into a dangerous pattern, known as the female athletic triad. This includes amenorrhea (missed or irregular menstrual periods); disordered eating (over-restricting calories); and possible stress fractures.
6. **Prompt physicals:** Have a pre-participation physical at least six to eight weeks before the start of the season. This allows time for treatment of any problems.
 - Take this [pre-participation physical form](#) with you to your appointment.
7. **Injury recognition:** There's no such thing as good pain. Pay attention to, and treat early, signs of injury.
8. **Avoid specialization:** Have fun, and mix it up with a variety of sports and activities. This helps avoid burnout and overuse injuries to growing joints and muscles.
9. **Be careful with weight lifting:** Athletes under age 17 should not "max out" or lift as much as they possibly can. Instead, they should focus on building strength through repetition of lifting a more moderate weight.
 - [Learn more about weight lifting for young athletes.](#)
10. **Hydration:** Stay hydrated. Thirty minutes before activity, young athletes should drink until no longer thirsty, plus another eight ounces. Athletes weighing less than 90 pounds should drink five ounces for every 20 minutes of activity. Athletes weighing more than 90 pounds should drink eight ounces every 20 minutes.
 - [Learn more about heat illness.](#)