



## **Little League Injury Prevention**

By: Trevor Winnegge DPT, MS, OCS, CSCS  
Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates

Attention coaches, parents and Little Leaguers! Baseball season is here again! Little League practices continue and if not already, pretty soon Little League season will be in full swing. With this comes a lot of fun, but also the potential for injury. Shoulder and elbow injuries are the most common Little League injuries, particularly among Little League pitchers.

Most often, shoulder and elbow injuries occur in youth baseball due to poorly conditioned throwing arms. Muscles of the shoulder are underdeveloped and then become overused which results in increased strain placed upon both the shoulder and the elbow. Many of these injuries are completely preventable through proper conditioning exercises and throwing activities before and during the baseball season. At Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates, we can work with youth baseball pitchers to develop the weaker muscles and prepare the athletes for a full rigorous season of baseball and pitching.

Another reason for the increase in youth baseball injuries is the amount of pitches an athlete is throwing. In the past, Little Leaguers were told they could only pitch 6 innings per week. However, this did not take into account how many pitches were thrown during those 6 innings. As a result, the USA Baseball Medical & Safety Committee has issued new youth baseball guidelines for pitch counts. A child between the ages of 8-10 should throw no more than 100 pitches in a week. This number goes up as the child ages, with 140 maximum pitch per week for ages 11-12; 150 for ages 13-14; 180 for ages 15-16; and 210 for ages 17-18. Throwing more pitches than these recommended pitch counts can result in overuse of the shoulder and elbow and can lead to muscle strain, and even worse, tearing of the muscles.

The USA Baseball Medical & Safety Advisory Committee also has made recommendations as to what age a child should start throwing various types of pitches. A child can throw a fastball at age 8, changeup at age 10, curveball at age 14, slider at age 16 and screwball at age 17. Throwing a curveball too early will lead to irreversible damage to the elbow and shoulder, which over time will lead to tearing of the elbow or shoulder.

In summary, these guidelines should be followed in order to allow for the youth baseball player to enjoy a full season, free of unnecessary injury. Prevention is key, and while not all injuries can be prevented, most shoulder and elbow injuries can.

Sturdy Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Associates is offering free screenings for individually tailored strength and conditioning programs to Little League organizations in its service area, including Attleboro, North Attleboro, Norton, Mansfield, Rehoboth, and Seekonk. We want to help prevent Little League shoulder and elbow injuries. This program, in conjunction with following the above guidelines, will help ensure a fun filled, injury free baseball season. For more information about our free screenings, please call Sturdy Memorial Hospital's Public Relations Department at **508/236-8020**.

*Trevor Winnegge is a licensed physical therapist with Sturdy Orthopedics & Sports Medicine Associates. The practice is located in Attleboro at 281 County Street – 508/226-2213.*