

Sports Injuries Affecting More Children's Feet

(NAPSA)—Many children dream of growing up to be a professional athlete. But some might not make it past junior high at the rate today's kids are competing.

Foot and ankle surgeons say they're seeing more injuries in children who play high-level sports such as gymnastics, tennis, soccer and volleyball.

"I'm treating chronic heel injuries in preteen athletes, where a few years ago we saw these cases only among 16- and 17-year-olds," says Robert J. Duggan, DPM, FACFAS, a foot and ankle surgeon from Orlando, Fla.

Duggan says injuries in these preteens include high-level sprains, ankle bone bruises, fractures to bones in the ball of the foot, painful and irritated nerves and heel injuries.

The American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons (ACFAS) recommends players, parents and coaches follow two steps:

First, seek prompt treatment. Delaying care and "playing through the pain" could make the injury worse.

Second, allow the injury time to heal. Follow through with full rehabilitation. Children who rush back into competition risk repeated injuries and instability in their feet and ankles well into their teen and adult years. Long-term problems can include osteoarthritis and chronic ankle instability. According to the ACFAS consumer Web site FootPhysicians.com, people with untreated chronic ankle instability may suffer activity limitations, arthritis and tendon problems.



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Luckily, treatments for many of the foot and ankle injuries young athletes suffer don't always require surgery.

"With the diagnostic tools available to foot and ankle surgeons and knowledge of the demands of the child's sport, we can make a decision on whether surgery's necessary and, in many cases, avoid it altogether," Duggan says.

Instead, the surgeon will often immobilize the child's foot for a period of time, followed by aggressive physical therapy.

Prompt treatment and rehabilitation can keep today's competitive young athletes in the game and keep the pro sports dream alive. For reliable information on foot and ankle conditions, or to find a foot and ankle surgeon nearby, visit FootPhysicians.com.