



Pediatric and Adolescent Sports Medicine Update

1st Quarter 2014

Injuries, Rehab and Nutrition

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Active children tend not to think about potential injuries, but muscle pulls, sprains, broken bones, stress fractures, or other orthopaedic injuries are often part of the game. Incorporating a healthy diet into everyday lifestyle plays a large key in injury prevention. However, what an athlete eats after an injury can help them to recuperate quickly, heal wounds, and strengthen bones & muscles – facilitating a faster recovery, and helping an athlete to get into an active lifestyle once again.

Recovery from an injury is often multi-faceted, focusing on healing, both physically and mentally. Approaching the rehabilitation process in a positive manner can help motivate athletes to return to their sport in a healthy manner. When an injury slows down your child athlete and their physical activity decreases, the athlete will naturally expend fewer calories. You can compensate for this by decreasing portion sizes appropriately. Encourage the athlete to eat nutrient-rich foods 3 to 4 times a day to provide the needed vitamins and minerals without extra calories from pre- or post-workout snacks.



Protein

Focusing on high quality protein foods containing essential amino acids aids in wound healing and keeps the immune system strong. If a patient undergoes surgery, the appetite is often suppressed post-operatively. Make sure to incorporate a small amount of protein in each snack or meal. Eggs, low-fat cheese or cottage cheese, yogurt and chicken noodle soup all provide quality protein and are usually well-tolerated in the early days of recovery after an injury or surgery. Vegetarians can obtain quality protein from soy-based foods. Almond milk is also popular in those wanting to avoid soy products, but is low in protein as compared to cow or soy milk. It is important to remember that protein is not just for muscle building – it is a key nutrient in bone building. This is an important factor in growing bones, as well as fracture healing. Remember to be sure to include protein with every meal and snack!

Vitamin C and Zinc

While all nutrients are important in healing, vitamin C and zinc are superstars for their roles in healing. Vitamin C is used by the body to make collagen – which is needed for repairing tendons & ligaments, and healing of surgical wounds. You can find Vitamin C in various citrus fruits, such as oranges, tangerines and grapefruit. Other sources of vitamin C, such as strawberries, kiwi fruit, baked potatoes, broccoli and bell peppers, all are high in this important nutrient as well. Zinc is a mineral found mostly in animal foods, such as meat, fish, poultry and dairy foods, but it is also present in whole-grain breads and cereals, dried beans & peas (legumes), and nuts. Zinc is best obtained from their natural sources, the food itself, rather than supplements. High-dose supplements often cause nausea and vomiting. Luckily, these nutrient-dense foods are easily incorporated into healthy meals for breakfast, lunch or dinner.



Vitamin D and Calcium

Calcium and vitamin D are nutrients associated with strong, healthy bones. It is important to build up stores of calcium and vitamin D to prevent stress fractures and osteopenia or osteoporosis. Calcium and vitamin D are important in bony healing as well. The best sources for these nutrients are low-fat dairy foods. These include fat-free dairy milk, yogurt, and cheese. Fat-free milk has slightly more calcium than full-fat or low-fat milk. Milk is often fortified with vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium. Yogurt, which is also a good source of calcium, is not always fortified with vitamin D. It is important to check the nutrition label of your favorite yogurts and supplement accordingly.

Fiber

Fiber also plays an important role in healing injured athletes! Pain medications prescribed commonly after an injury or surgery are notorious for causing constipation and upset stomachs. Fiber is an important part of a regular diet, but can help to ease the side effects of narcotic pain medications. Prunes or prune juice, along with drinking plenty of water, have a natural laxative effect.

Remember, these nutrients are all a part of a balanced diet! However, focusing on improving diet and obtaining key nutrients can help an athlete recover from an injury. This can also provide an advantage on the playing field by helping them to perform better and avoid injury long-term.



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