**Acute versus chronic injuries**

Acute sports injuries are caused by a sudden trauma and include broken bones, sprains, ligament injuries and strains. Most acute injuries need to be treated in a pediatric trauma centre.

Overuse injuries or chronic injuries occur gradually. A few of the chronic injuries commonly seen in young athletes include such things as tennis elbow, a strained Achilles tendon and shin splints. Even children who intensely practice piano or violin can suffer from overuse injuries to the wrists, hands and fingers.

At the Canada Shriners Hospital, Dr. Janelle treats children with chronic injuries. She says chronic injuries often go untreated for some time because the pain is low grade and, as a result, children continue competing despite the discomfort.

Depending on the area injured and the nature of the injury, Dr. Janelle can prescribe physiotherapy (legs, arms, shoulders), occupational therapy (elbows, wrists and hands), splints, braces and, if necessary, surgery.

Players, coaches and parents should be aware of the signs of chronic injury which include:

* Pain during play,
* Pain during exercise,
* A dull ache when at rest,
* Swelling.

**Don’t play through the pain**

To recover from a chronic injury, Dr. Janelle urges athletes to take a ‘time out’. “Part of the treatment plan is rest. You have to give your body, your skeleton, a chance to heal,” she says. “The good news, children heal more quickly than adults; the bad news, parents often think their child will bounce back which means they wait too long before consulting a doctor.”

**Preventing sports injuries**

Dr. Janelle offers several tips to help prevent injury:

1. **Learn the proper technique**: Make sure your child knows the proper techniques associated with his or her sport.
2. **Conditioning**: Make sure your child is in adequate shape for the activity. In other words, don’t expect a couch potato to play the full 90 minutes of a soccer match.
3. **Maturity and size**: Make sure your child is playing with kids of a similar size and weight. Too often teams are made up of children of the same age even though as teenagers, children who have not yet had a growth spurt find themselves facing off against much taller and heavier opponents.
4. **Stretch**: Make sure to warm up before the game and cool down after the game.
5. **Therapy**: Consider seeing a therapist. They might identify muscle groups that are weak and need conditioning in order to ensure peak performance and reduce the risk of injury.

**Gradually return to the game**

If you’ve just recovered from an injury, Dr. Janelle recommends gradually ramping up your activity level. If you’ve been side-lined for a few weeks by injury, don’t expect to compete at the same level as before. You have likely lost muscle tone, so go slowly. For example, if you play soccer, for the first week, you could jog around the field and practice individual drills. In week two, you can take part in practice. By week three, you can rejoin the game but should slowly add to your playing time.

“Pay attention to your body. If the pain returns, you need to sit out the game and give your body more time to heal,” warns Dr. Janelle.