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Newsletter

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No More 'Walking It Off' for Young Athletes

“Walking it off” or “playing through the pain” is no longer an option for young athletes with foot or ankle injuries, say U.S. experts. Athletic children who ignore injuries could face repeated injuries and foot instability well into their teens and adulthood, warned sports-medicine experts meeting in Orlando, Fla., for the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons annual scientific conference. Ignored injuries could also lead to long-term problems including osteoarthritis, chronic ankle instability, arthritis and tendon problems. More children are playing high-level competitive sports such as gymnastics, tennis, soccer, volleyball, track & field and golf, contributing to a rise in serious foot and ankle injuries in younger patients. “I’m treating chronic heel injuries in pre-teen athletes, where a few years ago we saw these cases only among 16- and 17-year-olds,” Robert J. Duggan, a leading sports-medicine expert with the ACFAS, said in a statement. “When the level of competition intensifies, so do the stresses on the feet and ankles and ultimately injuries.”

Editor’s Note: It’s important to use common sense and for parents to oversee what the next appropriate step should be. Following injury, it’s important to visit your healthcare professional, which of course, includes your local chiropractor.

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Juice Linked to Children’s Weight Gain

Children who drink fruit juices and fruit drinks are more likely to be overweight or obese than those who don’t, an Australian study found. A study of children 4 to 12 who drank more than two glasses of fruit juice/drinks per day were more likely to be overweight or obese, according to a study by Andrea Sanigorski, Colin Bell and Boyd Swinburn of Deakin University in Melbourne. Children who drank more than three glasses of soft drinks or four glasses of fruit juice/drinks a day were more than twice as likely to be overweight or obese compared with children who did not, the study said.

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Exercise for Low Back Pain

Back pain might go away for a while, but you never know when it will return. Research shows that recurrence rates for low back pain soar as high as 50% in the 12 months following the initial episode. Although patients are encouraged to return to normal activities as soon as possible, many fear that activity will only make their pain worse. In July, the British Medical Journal published a study that evaluated the effectiveness of an exercise program for dealing with back pain. One hundred and eighty-seven patients with low back pain of 1-6 months duration were divided into an exercise group or a control group. The exercise group participated in 8 one-hour classes that included muscle strengthening, stretching, relaxation techniques and brief education on back care. The control group continued under the care of their doctor. Questionnaires completed six months and one year after the program revealed that patients in the exercise group reported less back pain and associated disability than the control group. The exercise group also took less days off work than the control group in the 12-month follow-up period (378 days by the exercise group vs. 607 days by the control group). As these results suggest, something can be done about back pain. In fact, exercise is just one of many potential options available to back pain sufferers. A doctor of chiropractic can evaluate you and outline the most appropriate course of rehabilitation for your condition.

Reference: Moffett JK, Torgerson D, Bell-Syer S, et al. Randomized controlled trial of exercise for low back pain: clinical outcomes, cost and preferences. British Medical Journal, July 31, 1999; Vol. 319, No. 7205, pp279-283.

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Some Video Games Can Improve Vision

A University of Rochester study found playing action video games sharpens vision -- especially in those with amblyopia, known as "lazy eye." The study in Psychological Science found video action game-players did better on tests of visual acuity that assess the ability to see objects accurately in a cluttered space than their non-playing peers. "Action video game play changes the way our brains process visual information," Daphne Bavelier, professor of brain and cognitive sciences, said in a statement.

"After just 30 hours of training, people who normally don't play video games showed a substantial increase in the spatial resolution of their vision, meaning they could see small, closely packed letters more clearly." However, only certain games, such as first-person action games, are beneficial. Puzzle games have no effect, according to Bavelier.

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Middle-Aged Women Feel Much Younger

A new survey says 49 percent of U.S. women ages 40 to 55 say they feel younger than they actually are -- an average 17 years younger. Moreover, one-third of these women have sex more frequently now than in their 20s, according to the survey conducted by Kelton Research and commissioned by Estroven.

"These results further debunk the myth that menopausal women in their 40s and 50s suffer inordinately from depression and unrest," Dr. Donnica Moore, founder of DrDonnica.com, a women's health information Web site, said in a statement. "Quite the contrary, many women in their 40s and 50s experience what Margaret Mead termed 'postmenopausal zest.' Women are less inclined to accept the notion that middle age and menopause are tantamount to being 'old,' and that's a very refreshing and instructional attitude." When asked about the worst part of dealing with menopause, 24 percent of women ranked either prescription drugs or expensive doctor visits as their top concern.

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Young Teens Get Alcohol from Parents

More than one-third of the alcohol consumed by teens 11 to 14 years old came from their parents, friends' parents or guardians, a U.S. study found. Only a small fraction -- 2.4 percent in the 6th grade and 5.6 percent at the end of the 8th grade -- obtain alcohol from commercial venues, according to the study published in the June issue of Preventive Medicine.

Principal investigator Kelli Komro, lead author Mary O. Hearst and colleagues studied 3,709 students, mainly of Hispanic and African-American backgrounds, who were surveyed in 58 Chicago public schools at the beginning and end of the 6th, 7th and 8th grades. The study is unique as no other study has followed young, racially diverse, poor urban youth over a 2 1/2-year period, observing patterns of social and commercial alcohol access, according to the researchers.

The study also found that while 17 percent at the start of the 6th grade drank alcohol, more than twice as many -- 41 percent -- were drinking by the end of the 8th grade.

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Too Much Exercise Can Be Exercise Disorder

If people exercise because they feel compelled to do so, despite injuries, they may be at risk for an exercise disorder, says a U.S. expert. There is no set formula or standard that reveals how much exercising is too much," Theresa Fassihi, a psychologist with the Eating Disorders Program at The Menninger Clinic, says in a statement. "But if exercising is interfering in a person's life, and it is compulsory, then it may be a problem." If people exercise frequently because they enjoy it and they like the health benefits it provides, they may have the right reasons for exercise. But if they run in the morning, train for the next marathon at night despite a nagging injury, and head to the gym to weight train in their free time, they may be at risk for developing an exercise disorder, according to Fassihi. Those with exercise disorders commonly restrict their calories, based on the mistaken belief that they will build a higher proportion of muscle if they restrict their food intake while exercising.

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Study: Teen Weight-Loss Surgery Balloons

Weight loss surgery for teens is still uncommon, but increasing fast, a new U.S. study says. The number of adolescents undergoing bariatric surgery for weight loss more than tripled between 2000-03, but teens still account for less than 1 percent of the procedures, according to an article in the March issue of Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine.

The two most common types of the surgery are gastric bypass and gastric banding, both of which lead to weight loss by altering the path food takes through the digestive system. The surgery has become increasingly common for severely obese adults who fear the health effects of being overweight. Using data from a nationwide database of community hospital data, researchers from Robert Wood Johnson medical school determined that only 771 of the 105,473 weight-loss surgeries in 2003 were performed on teenagers. Though younger patients tended to recuperate faster, they suffered many of the same surgical complications as adults, including respiratory problems which affected 84 percent of adolescents versus 67 percent of adults. More research is needed to learn the long-term effects of gastric surgery for younger patients, the authors conclude.

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School-Based Program Cuts Kids' Cavities

A U.S. school-based program that gives children oral-health education, dental exams, cleanings and preventive care reduced cavities by 50 percent. The program, called ForsythKids, resulted in a 50-percent reduction of cavities after one round of treatment in kids who participated. After two rounds, there was virtually no new tooth decay. The findings were presented by Boston-based Forsyth Institute scientists at the 85th General Session of the International Association for Dental Research in New Orleans. "Our initial studies have shown that you can effectively prevent, what is today, the most common childhood disease -- tooth decay," Richard Niederman, director of the Center for Evidence-Based Dentistry at The Forsyth Institute, said in a statement. "Just two weeks ago we saw a terrible tragedy in the national news about a tooth infection that led to the untimely death of a 12-year-old boy, who like thousands of other children, did not have access to dental care."

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Smoking Parents Affect Children's Lungs

Children of smokers who don't show any signs of respiratory problems may still have damaged lung function later in life, according to a Dutch study. "Everyone knows that children of smokers have more respiratory problems -- more puffing, wheezing, cases of pneumonia -- but until now we haven't known if lung function is impaired in children of smokers who don't have any respiratory complaints or diagnosed lung problems," Dr. Bert Arets of the University Medical Center Utrecht in the Netherlands said in a statement.

The study of 244 children ages 4 to 12 without any history of lung or airway disease was divided into four groups according to the smoking pattern of their parents: never smoked, smoked after birth but not during pregnancy, smoked during pregnancy but not after birth, and smoked both before and after birth. The study found that children of smoking parents had significantly reduced lung function, similar to that seen in smokers. Smoking after birth appeared to be more harmful than smoking during pregnancy alone, according to the findings presented at the American Thoracic Society International Conference in San Francisco.

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Exercise Prevents Repetitive Strain Injury

An active lifestyle outside of work may help protect against work-related repetitive strain injury, a Canadian study found. C.R. Ratzlaff of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver analyzed data from the 2003 Canadian Community Health Survey, a population-based national survey that includes data on 58,622 full-time workers between 15 and 74. The study in the April issue of Arthritis Care & Research discovered being physically active over 50 was also protective against repetitive strain injury. Leisure-time physical activity may promote mechanical and metabolic processes in the musculoskeletal system, which counter the repetitive or sedentary effects of many jobs, the study authors said.

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Health Tips: Carpal Tunnel Syndrome:

If you're performing jobs or participating in activities that require repetitive hand movements, you might be at risk for developing carpal tunnel syndrome.

The condition, caused by inflammation and irritation in the narrow groove formed by eight small bones and tissue in the wrist, affects an estimated 3.7 percent of the U.S. population, or some 8.1 million individuals.

Those most susceptible to the potentially debilitating ailment include mechanics, cashiers, carpenters, grocery store checkers, manufacturing or assembly-line workers, violinists, gardeners, golfers and knitters. Heavy computer use and typing also are suspected of bringing on CTS, which is characterized by:

- + An ache in the wrist that may move into the hand or forearm;
- + Swelling in the wrist and hand;
- + Numbness, burning or tingling in the hand and fingers;
- + Increased pain when moving the hand or wrist;
- + Weakness in the thumb and first three fingers;
- + Loss of strength and difficulty gripping objects;
- + Pain in the wrist, palm or forearm;
- + Pronounced pain and/or numbing during sleep;
- + Muscle atrophy.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, women are three times as likely as men to suffer from CTS, perhaps because their wrist bones tend to be smaller, creating a tighter space through which the nerves and tendons must pass. Their genetic makeup may also increase the likelihood of musculoskeletal injuries, and their hormonal changes during pregnancy and menopause may make them more susceptible.

CTS also can be brought on or exacerbated by a misalignment of the carpal bones and wrist, trauma to the wrist, arthritis, gout, neck and shoulder problems and tumors.

Preventing Carpel Tunnel Syndrome:

Steps to prevent carpal tunnel syndrome, including:

- + Change your work environment to lessen the stress and strain on the wrist and hand.
- + Make sure the workspace and equipment are at the right height and distance for the hands and wrist. For computer users, the keyboard should be placed high enough to permit the wrist to rest comfortably without bending.
- + For most people, the workspace should be some 27 to 29 inches above the floor.
- + Keep your elbows close to your sides as you type to reduce the strain on your forearm.
- + Maintain good posture and wrist position.
- + Take a 10-to-15-minute break every hour to give your hands and wrists time to rest and recover.
- + Vary your tasks, avoiding repetitive motions, or at least breaking them up each hour with movements that work different muscles.
- + Relax your grip, unwind your muscles and practice gentle, loose hand and wrist motions to avoid stress and tension that can strain and irritate muscle.
- + Exercise, flexing and bending the wrists and hands in the opposite direction from the repetitive movement. A sample: after typing, make a tight fist, hold, stretch the fingers, hold, repeat several times.
- + Keep your hands warm, even if you have to wear fingerless gloves during work.

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