

Early sports specialization tied to increased injury rates in college athletes

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Sixty million kids participate in organized athletics each year with ever increasing amounts of children specializing in one sport before the age of 14 with hopes of a college scholarship or professional career on the line. However, researchers presenting their work at the AOSSM/AANA Specialty Day today reveal that this early intense participation might come at the cost of increased injuries during their athletic careers.

"Our research indicated that athletes who specialized in their varsity sport before the age of 14 were more likely to report a history of injuries and multiple college injuries during the course of their athletic career," said author, Brian M. Cash, MD from the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Cash and his colleagues sent a voluntary survey to 652 athletes who participated in athletics at a single institution. Participants were asked about demographics, scholarship status, reasons for sports specialization, age of specialization, training volume, and injury/surgical history. A total of 202 surveys were available for analysis after some were excluded due to incomplete or incorrect survey completion. Injuries were defined as those which kept an [athlete](#) out of participation for more than one week. High training volume was defined as greater than 28 hours per week during pre-[high school](#) years. 86.9% vs. 74% of individuals who specialized early reported a history of injury, (64.6% vs. 49.4%) reported multiple injuries and these athletes were held out of sport participation an average of 15.2 vs. 7.0 weeks in those that did not specialize early. However, early specializers were also more likely to receive a college scholarship (92.9 vs 83.1%). Full-scholarship athletes were more likely to report multiple surgical injuries (11.7 vs 3.5%).

In addition, those who trained more than 28 hours per week in their varsity sport before high school were more likely to report multiple injuries (90.0 vs.

56.7%). Individuals with a pre-high school training volume greater than 28 hours/week were not more likely to be recruited (90.0 vs. 89%) or receive a scholarship (80% vs. 74.5%).

"Sports participation is an excellent way for kids to maintain their health and possibly even receive a college [scholarship](#). However, our research further highlights that avoiding sports specialization before the age of 14 and minimizing training time to less than 28 hours per week, may significantly minimize a child's [injury](#) chances and promote long-term, athletic [college](#) or even elite success," said Cash.

More information:

[www.sportsmed.org/aossmimis/me ... search-Abstracts.pdf](http://www.sportsmed.org/aossmimis/me...search-Abstracts.pdf)

Provided by American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine

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