

Ready to resume sports? Health tips for getting back in the game

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Kids and teens may be eager to return to their regular sports routines when it's possible to play again, after being sidelined by COVID-19 restrictions.

But a sports medicine specialist in California says they should take it slow to avoid injury.

"I understand the excitement about returning to sports, but sometimes kids can get too excited and rev up too soon," said Dr. Bianca Edison of Children's Orthopaedic Center at Children's Hospital Los Angeles. "We've been seeing a sudden rush of injuries happening because a gradual return wasn't pursued."

Injuries can occur whenever an athlete has been sidelined. Edison offered tips for getting kids safely back to their sports.

If [young people](#) haven't maintained their fitness routine during the break, it's important to re-establish their training levels over six to eight weeks, Edison said. The [muscle memory](#) that protects joints and helps prevent injury needs to be built up again because inactivity can cause

muscles to weaken and affects overall stamina, she said.

"That's why it's so important to not suddenly go from zero to 100," Edison said in a hospital news release. "Without the adequate rebuilding of muscles, you could put too much stress on a certain part of the body. For example, we've seen a large number of baseball players who lost a lot of strength underneath their shoulder blades and in the core while they weren't playing. Then they get back on the mound and throw too hard and tear their UCL [ulnar collateral ligament]. A gradual process is a must."

It's also important to make proper nutrition and hydration a priority. That helps keep the brain in good shape, Edison said, pointing to a 2018 study that showed dehydration alters brain shape and thinking. Hydration can also affect reaction time, she noted.

"It only takes a bit of dehydration for your [reaction time](#) to start declining," Edison said. "If that's slowed down, you're not as agile and you're not seeing that ball coming toward you."

Sleep is another priority. Get enough sleep and limit screen time before bed, she advised. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends nine to 12 hours of sleep a night for children who are 6 to 12 years old. Teens should sleep eight to 10 hours.

Edison said parents and coaches should encourage [young athletes](#) to check in with their bodies to make sure nothing is hurting. Parents should regularly ask their kids how they feel about going back to their sport and if they want to train at the next level or stay where they have been for a while.

"Any sort of mental hesitation can also cause a setback or increase an athlete's risk of [injury](#),"

Edison said. "Even though kids can be really excited to get back to how they were playing before, we have to honor, not rush, the process so that they can perform well."

Young people who were diagnosed with COVID-19 should be evaluated by their primary care doctor, sports medicine physicians and cardiologists before returning to any form of athletics, Edison said.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics offers guidance on [sports during the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

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