

## Preventing Little League shoulder and elbow

**L**ittle League shoulder and Little League elbow are the names that have been given to common overuse injuries of those joints that cause pain and disability in baseball players. These injuries occur most often in pitchers but also in other frequent throwers, such as catchers, shortstops, third basemen, and outfielders. They usually respond well to prompt treatment but, if ignored, can end a young player's throwing career and may lead to problems later in life. The following guidelines can help you, with your parents' help, avoid Little League shoulder and Little League elbow.

**Pitch count.** The following maximum pitch counts have been established as safe for pitchers of different ages. They apply to maximum-effort pitches thrown *in games only*.

**ⓧ 9- to 10-year-old pitcher**

- 50 pitches a game
- 75 pitches a week
- 1,000 pitches a season
- 2,000 pitches a year

**ⓧ 11- to 12-year-old pitcher**

- 75 pitches a game
- 100 pitches a week
- 1,000 pitches a season
- 3,000 pitches a year

**ⓧ 13- to 15-year-old pitcher**

- 75 pitches a game
- 125 pitches a week
- 1,000 pitches a season
- 3,000 pitches a year

Skeletally mature pitchers (16 years of age and over) need individualized guidelines based on skill level and input from trainers, coaches, and physicians.

**Pitching skills.** Master pitching skills in this order:

- ⓧ **Control**, or getting the ball over the plate in the strike zone
- ⓧ **Command**, or placing the ball in certain areas of the strike zone
- ⓧ **Velocity**, or speed of the pitch
- ⓧ **Ball movement** during the pitch (curveball, slider, etc.)

**Appropriate pitches.** Certain types of pitches are inappropriate for younger pitchers whose bones are immature. This list shows what pitches can be thrown at what age (and no earlier):

<b>Fastball</b>	8 years
<b>Change-up</b>	10 years
<b>Curveball</b>	14 years
<b>Knuckleball</b>	15 years
<b>Slider</b>	16 years
<b>Screwball</b>	17 years

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### **Tips for pitchers**

- ⌚ Do not play through pain.
- ⌚ Warm up and break a sweat before all practices and games.
- ⌚ Warm up your arm by throwing lightly and by progressively increasing the velocity and distance of your throw.
- ⌚ Do not pitch and then play another heavy throwing position, such as third base or shortstop, in the same game.
- ⌚ Do not practice pitching after a game.
- ⌚ Rest your arm for at least 24 hours after pitching.
- ⌚ Stay physically fit all year round, not just when you are playing baseball. Do lifting exercises (resistance training) that focus on the legs and trunk as well as the arms to build overall strength. Avoid power lifting and “maxing out.”

### **For parents: Tips for managing your child’s pitching**

- ⌚ Allow your child to pitch in only one league in a single season.
- ⌚ Your child should play only two seasons of the year. Adding a third season may increase the risk of injury and should be discussed with your child’s physician. Young athletes should never play all four seasons. They should always take at least three months of rest a year from throwing and activities that involve lifting the arms over the head (such as swimming, playing quarterback in football, and racquet sports).
- ⌚ Consult a doctor about throwing injuries to your child that are not relieved by four days of rest and ice.
- ⌚ Bring your child to see a physician if pain in his (or her) shoulder or elbow recurs the next time he throws or pitches.
- ⌚ Emphasize the benefits of year-round physical fitness to your child and encourage fundamental fitness skills. Resistance training (lifting exercises) is important for all athletes and should be appropriate for the child’s age. Once an athlete turns 16 or 17, he can begin adult resistance training programs, taking care to use proper technique and form.