

Swimming safety

A parent's guide for keeping kids in the game.



Like many other sports, swimming is becoming a year-round activity. The increase in training sessions, weight lifting, and cross training is leading to an increase in injuries among swimmers. This reference guide provides information on swimming injuries that require treatment.

Shoulder injuries

Swimming can lead to overuse injuries in the arms, elbows, and shoulders. Overuse injuries tend to occur when tissue such as muscles and tendons are damaged by repetitive motion activities. Without adequate time for recovery, the tissue cannot adapt to the demands placed on it and further damage is likely. Some common overuse shoulder injuries are:

- **Swimmer's shoulder** — an inflammation and pinching of the biceps tendon in the shoulder. This condition is treated with ice and modifying activity.
- **Labral tears** — Small tearing of the cartilage in the shoulder caused by repeated overhead swimming strokes. This injury may require surgery to repair and prevent further tearing.

Symptoms of overuse injuries, also considered chronic sports injuries, include:

- Pain when performing the activity or sport
- Dull pain even at rest
- Intermittent swelling
- Loss of motion at the shoulder or wrist
- Decreasing performance

Back pain

Swimming puts a lot of demand on a young athlete's back due to repetitive maneuvers that require hyperextension of the back and changes of direction. Some injuries to the back occur suddenly, and are commonly known as a back strain. Others occur more gradually, especially if the body doesn't have time to recover properly. Over time, repeated hyperextension of the low back can cause:

- **Spondylolysis** — a stress fracture of the bones in the lower spine, or lumbar vertebrae.
- **Spondylolisthesis** — the lumbar vertebrae slips forward, if an athlete with a stress fracture continues to participate in the sport.

Knee injuries

A common injury in breaststroke swimmers is a medial collateral ligament (MCL) sprain or tear, which occurs when the knee is forced inward during a breaststroke kick. Athletes with a damaged MCL often experience pain, which may be followed by a lot of swelling within 24 hours. Athletes should see a pediatrician or pediatric sports medicine physician if pain and/or swelling persist. Knee pain that comes on slowly over time can indicate other problems such as joint alignment, cartilage defects, and damage to tissues caused by repetitive movements and activity. Athletes with gradual pain problems should see their pediatrician or pediatric sports medicine physician if pain returns quickly with activity at the next session or is not gone after two weeks of forced rest.

Weight management

Swimmers should aim to stay close to their competition weight in the off-season in order to avoid dangerous weight-cutting practices during the competitive season. Swimmers who desire to lose weight should not lose more than one to two pounds a week to avoid break down of lean body mass. Weight loss is best achieved using a combination of reducing caloric intake and increasing calories burned. Nutrition tips for good weight control include:

- Give your body energy from sources of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Do not omit any food groups.
- Choose whole-grain foods, lean protein, and healthy fats at meal times.
- Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and fiber.



Swimming safety (cont.)



- Drink calorie-free beverages; eat fresh fruits instead of drinking fruit juices.
- Watch your portion sizes.
- Choose low-fat dairy products.
- Do not skip meals. Eat a healthy snack if hungry in between meals.
- Limit high-calorie foods with added sugar and fat.

Sports safety

Children ages five to 14 make up almost 40% of all sports injuries treated in hospital emergency rooms. Injuries in children are best handled by pediatric specialists trained in treating skeletally immature patients.

How to protect your child

- Schedule your child for an annual physical before playing sports.
- Monitor play and practice and encourage players to abide by the rules.
- Have a first aid kit handy and an emergency action plan in place.
- Keep sports fun! Remember to be positive and don't push kids to perform beyond their abilities.

Bumps, bruises, twists, and muscle strains

These can affect all areas of the body. Recommended treatment is the **PRICE** formula:

- P**rotect the area with a sling or crutches, if necessary.
- R**est the injured area.
- I**ce the injury for 20 minutes at a time. Do not apply the ice directly to the skin.
- C**ompress the injured area with a wrap. Do not pull tightly, as this can cut off circulation.
- E**levate the injured area above the heart.

Make sure your young athlete:

- Wears appropriate properly fitting safety gear, free of heavy wear and tear.
- Stays properly hydrated. Kids don't sweat as much as adults and need to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after activity.
- Does warm-up and cool-down exercises before and after practices and games.
- Gets proper rest and avoids overdoing it.

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes.

Specialists your child has access to include adolescent medicine physicians, cardiologists, emergency medicine physicians, neurologists, nutritionists, orthopedists, pediatric psychologists, physical therapists, pulmonologists, radiologists, and rehabilitation specialists. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and supports for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call or text us **24/7 at 314-577-5640**.

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital providers, **24 hours a day in the ER at:** SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, DePaul Hospital, St. Clare Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital-St. Charles, St. Joseph Hospital-Lake St. Louis, Anderson Hospital, and HSHS St. Elizabeth Hospital.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, SSM Health ministries implemented enhanced safety measures, which are evaluated periodically based on COVID-19 transmission numbers. To ensure your protection and that of others, we continue to require face masks upon entry along with ministry-specific screening processes.