

Weekend Doctor

By **DR. THOMAS F. VAIL**

Every fall, I notice an increase in ankle injuries among young athletes. Football, soccer and basketball are the sports most likely to lead to sprains, broken bones and other problems.

My top recommendation is for parents to get ankle injuries treated right away.

What seems like a sprain is not always a sprain.

In addition to cartilage injuries, your son or daughter might have injured other bones in the foot without knowing it.

Have a qualified doctor examine the injury.

The sooner rehabilitation starts, the sooner we can prevent long-term problems like instability or arthritis, and the sooner your child can get back into competition.

Parents should follow these additional tips:

Have old sprains checked by a doctor before the season starts.

A medical check-up can reveal whether your child's previously injured ankle might be vulnerable to sprains, and could possibly benefit from wearing a supportive ankle brace during competition.

There are some very good supportive ankle braces available now that fit into most athletic shoes.

Your podiatrist will be able to recommend the proper brace for your children's condition.

Buy the right shoe for the sport. Different sports require different shoe gear.

Players shouldn't mix baseball cleats with football shoes.

Children should start the season with new shoes.

Old shoes can wear down like a car tire and become uneven on the bottom, causing the ankle to tilt because the foot can't lie flat.

If you see a repetitive wear pattern on the bottom of your children's shoes, they probably would benefit from custom orthotics.

All children can benefit from custom orthotics.

Today, custom molded orthotics come in many shapes, sizes and materials that allow people to stand, walk, and run more efficiently and comfortably.

While over-the-counter orthotics are available and may help people with mild symptoms, they normally cannot correct the wide range of symptoms that prescription foot orthoses can since they are not custom made to fit an individual's unique foot structure.

Consult your podiatrist on the newest materials for custom orthotics specifically made for your child's particular sport.

Check playing fields for dips, divots and holes. Most sports-related ankle sprains are caused by jumping and running on uneven surfaces.

That's why some surgeons recommend parents walk the field, especially when children compete in non-professional settings like public parks, for spots that could catch a player's foot and throw them to the ground.

Alert coaching officials to any irregularities.

Lastly, encourage stretching and warm-up exercises.

Calf stretches and light jogging before competition helps warm up ligaments and blood vessels, reducing the risk for ankle injuries.



Vail

Vail is with Advanced Footcare Clinic, Findlay. Questions for Blanchard Valley Health System doctors may be sent to weekend@thecourier.com, or to Weekend, The Courier, P.O. Box 609, Findlay, OH 45839-0609.