



Common softball injuries

While softball isn't generally considered a dangerous sport, the National Center for Health Statistics reports that baseball and softball account for 9.4 percent of sports-related visits to the emergency room—almost as many as football (10.3 percent). Players can get hurt by hard-hit balls, wild pitches and collisions on the base paths. In addition, overuse injuries such as tendinitis and back, neck, shoulder and elbow pain are common to softball players.

Fortunately, athletes can stay safe by wearing proper equipment, getting appropriate rest between games and practices and playing the game by the rules.



Player Safety

Common accidents, serious injuries

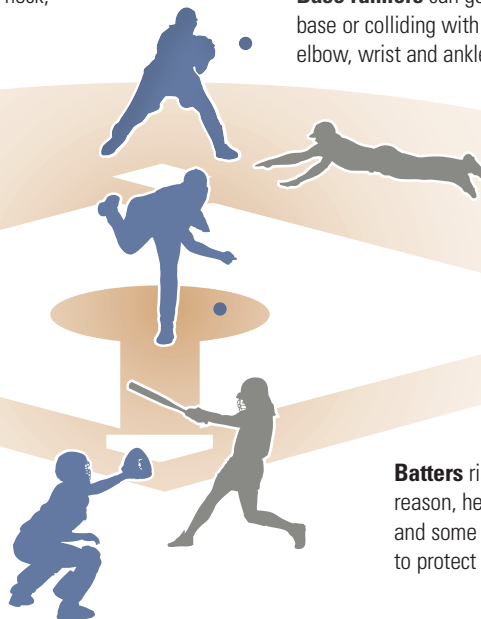


Pitchers use a windmill motion when winding up and delivering the ball to the plate that places stress on the back, neck, shoulder, forearm and wrist.

Base runners can get hurt sliding into a base or colliding with infielders. Shoulder, elbow, wrist and ankle injuries are common.



Catchers are the most vulnerable players on the diamond. Wild pitches, flying bats, plays at the plate and collision with the backstop while chasing foul balls can lead to cuts, bruises and worse. Proper equipment and proper playing technique are crucial.



Batters risk being hit by pitched balls. For this reason, helmets are required in youth softball, and some leagues call for facemasks or shields to protect the face.

How can you prevent softball injuries?

Sore, stiff and tired

Softball players spend countless hours in the batting cage, field hundreds of ground balls, and make hundreds of throws. Repetition is the key to improvement, but it also contributes to soreness, stiffness and fatigue. To reduce the risk of injury, young players should:

- **Warm up before games and practices** by stretching, running and playing a light game of catch
- **Work on technique.** Catching, throwing or batting incorrectly can produce soreness, strains and other problems over time.

Rest and recover

It's common for competitive softball players to play two games per day on two or three consecutive days. In addition, some players compete year-round or belong to multiple teams. This heavy schedule can lead to overuse injuries, so it's extremely important for coaches and staff to allow appropriate time for players to rest and recover.

Protecting pitchers

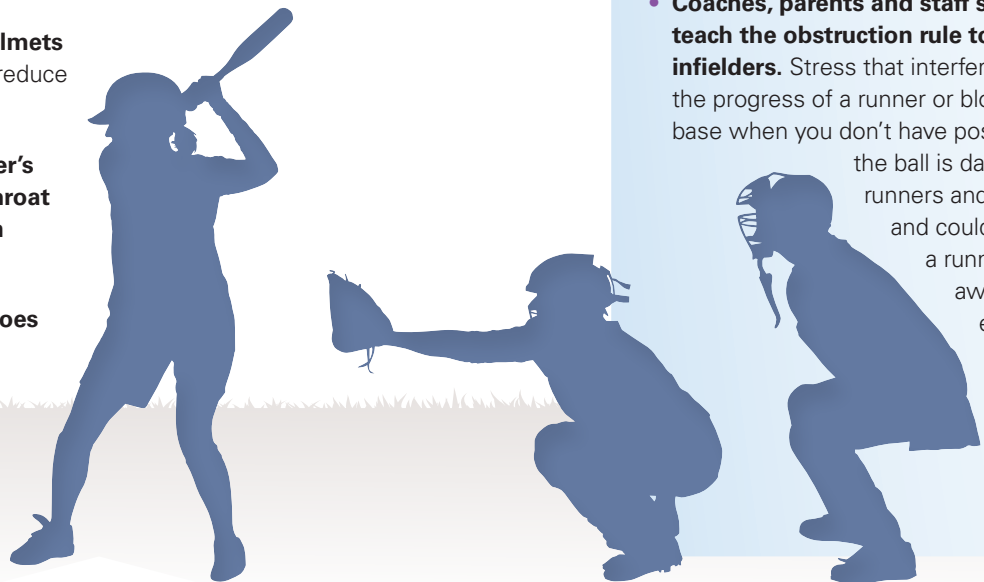
At all levels of softball, pitchers must monitor their workloads and get proper rest between starts. As a general rule, girls 12 years old and younger should pitch no more than two consecutive days. Girls 13 and above should pitch no more than three straight days.

Pitchers can stay loose between starts with some stretching or by taking part in hitting and fielding drills.

What to wear?

Equipment that is worn correctly and fits properly is essential to staying safe on the softball field. Here's what every player should wear:

- **Batting helmets** should be worn at the plate, in the on-deck circle and while running the bases.
- Players may consider wearing **helmets with protective face shields** to reduce the risk of facial injury.
- All catchers should wear a **catcher's mitt, helmet with face mask, throat guard, chest protector and shin guards.**
- Players should wear **cleats or shoes specially designed for softball.**



Safe at Every Base

Play on the infield is exciting, but also potentially dangerous. Here are some general rules for softball base running and infield defense:

- **Players should practice sliding** using breakaway bases or a sliding bag. To prevent cuts and bruises, sliding pants can be worn during practice.
- **Only older players, approximately 10 and older, should be allowed to slide.**
- **Sliding not only increases a runner's chance of being safe at a base, it reduces the chance of a collision.** This is particularly important for plays at home plate, where a hard-charging runner, a determined catcher, and a fast-flying softball come together in one spot. Sliding into home, rather than trying to knock the catcher over to jar the ball loose, may reduce the chance of injury.
- **Some leagues use a separate bag for both the runner and first baseman.** Known as a "double bag," this set-up can prevent ankle and foot injuries for runners and fielders at first base.
- **Coaches, parents and staff should teach the obstruction rule to infielders.** Stress that interfering with the progress of a runner or blocking the base when you don't have possession of the ball is dangerous to runners and fielders—and could result in a runner being awarded an extra base.



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This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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