

## Tips on staying healthy

### Can your child avoid injuries?

Sports injuries will happen but can be reduced by looking after your child's general health, adopting good training regimes, and dealing with injuries correctly when they happen.

- Make sure you report even slight niggles to your child's coach or physiotherapist.
- Make sure your child eats enough of the right things at the right times.
- Ensure your child gets eight to ten hours of sleep a night.
- Keep at least one day a week free from training and competition.
- Watch for signs of over-training, e.g. poor sleep patterns, increased resting heart rate, weight loss, general tiredness, and, for girls, menstruation often stops with over training.
- Ask a physiotherapist to assess any muscle or soft tissue imbalances.

### What should you do if your child is injured?

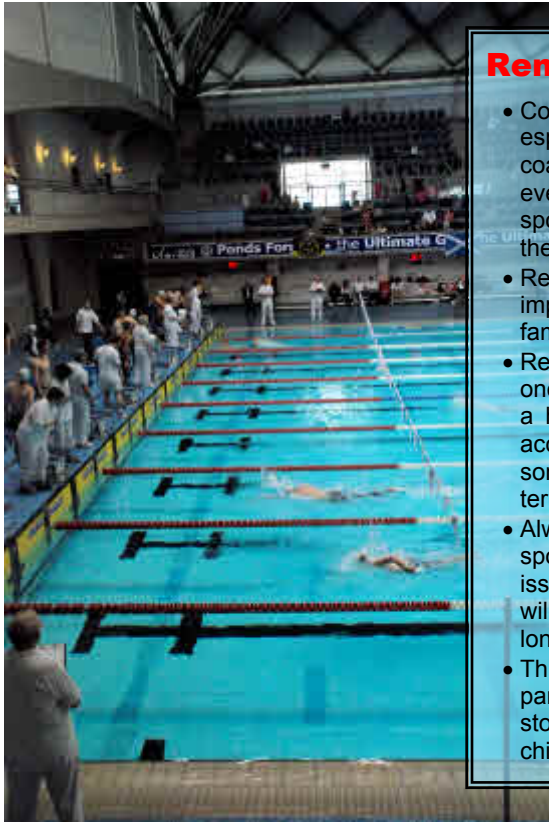
- Seek advice early - do not wait for a niggling injury to become a serious one.
- When dealing with soft tissue injuries, e.g. bruising, swelling, sprains etc., remember the RICE principle (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation).
- Always seek medical advice if there is any possibility of a head injury such as concussion.
- If in doubt, always seek advice from a doctor or qualified physiotherapist - make sure you have a good sports physiotherapist that you can rely on.
- Remember that it is unwise for your child to train in anyway that aggravates an injured part of the body - it is unwise for you child to continue when injured.

### Remember

- Communicate regularly with everyone, especially with your child, your child's coach and teachers. Make sure everyone is up to speed with your child's sporting plan, goals and aspirations for the year.
- Remember that a balanced lifestyle is important for your child as well as your family.
- Recognise changing priorities: at times one area of your child's life may take on a higher priority than others, so accepting temporary compromises in some areas will compensate for short-term re-prioritisation in others.
- Always remember that there is life after sport: think about career and education issues, and make sure your child's life will be full and fulfilling when sport is no longer so important.
- Think about your roles as a performance parent: what could you do or do more, stop doing or do less, to support your child better as a talented young athlete.

## How to Help Your Child Achieve

- ✓ Love them unconditionally.
- ✓ Support their coaches.
- ✓ Even if you were an athlete and even if you are a trained coach, resist the temptation to coach your own child, it rarely works. Eliminate the phrase "what we did when I was swimming...."
- ✓ Accept that they cannot win every time they compete. Praise qualities such as effort, attempting new skills and hard work rather than winning. Accept "flat spots" or plateaus-times when your child does not improve. During these times encourage participation for fun, focus on learning skills and help develop perseverance and patience.
- ✓ Allow them to be kids and have fun. Encourage occasional "down time"-no school or sport-just time to be kids. Help them to develop as people with character and values. Encourage relationships and friendships away from training, competition and school work-it's all about balance.
- ✓ Turn off as a sporting parent: don't make sport the one and only topic of conversation at the dinner table, in the car, etc. Have your "guilt gland" removed: this will help you avoid phrases like "I've got better things to do with my time" or "do you realize how much we give up so that you can swim?" Everyone loses when you play the guilt game.
- ✓ Don't introduce your child as "This is my son/daughter the swimmer." Their sports are something they do, not who they are.
- ✓ Don't do everything for them: teach responsibility and self-management. Believe it or not, kids can learn to pack and unpack their training bags and fill their own water bottles: teach and encourage them to take control of their own sporting careers.
- ✓ Reward frequently for success and effort but make the rewards small, simple, practical and personal. Kids don't need a CD or £20 just for a PB or getting a medal. Reward them with what they really love: your time!
- ✓ Be calm, relaxed and dignified at competitions. Cheer for your child appropriately. Do not embarrass yourself or your child.
- ✓ Accept that progress in any sport takes a long time: at least 7 to 10 years after maturation in most sports for the athlete to reach full potential.
- ✓ Skills and attitude are most important. Don't waste money on the latest and greatest equipment or gimmicks, hoping to buy a short cut to success.
- ✓ Encourage the same commitment and passion for school and study as you do for sport.
- ✓ Avoid relying on or encouraging "sports food" or "sports supplements"-focus on a sensible, balanced diet which includes a variety of wholesome foods. Believe it or not, your kids are unlikely to die from drinking tap water! Success comes from consistently practicing skills and developing an attitude where the love of the sport and physical fitness are the real "magic."
- ✓ Allow kids to try many sports and activities. Don't specialize too early. There is no such thing as a 10 year old Olympic swimmer. Encourage activities which build broad, general movement skills like running, catching, throwing, agility, balance, co-ordination, speed and rhythm. These general skills can have a positive impact on all sports. Be aware that your child's passion for a particular sport may change. Be aware that skills learned in one sport can often transfer to another.



- ✓ Help and support your children to achieve the goals they set, then take time to relax, celebrate and enjoy their achievements as a family. Attend practice regularly to show that you are interested in the effort and process, not just in the win/lose outcome.
- ✓ Never use training or sport as punishment- i.e. more laps/more training.
- ✓ Car pool. Get to know the other kids and families on the team and in turn you can allow your child to be more independent by doing things with other trusted adults.
- ✓ Tell your children you are proud of them for being involved in healthy activities.
- ✓ Teach your child the importance of “team”- where working together and supporting each other are important attributes. Volunteer your time for the team. Encourage your children to learn leadership and practice concepts like sharing, selflessness, team work and generosity. Help raise money for the team and kids, even if your own child does not directly benefit from the fundraising.
- ✓ Make sure that each week includes some family time where you do family things and talk about family issues-not about sport. Do a family fitness class-yoga or martial arts or another sport unrelated to the child’s main sport. Everyone benefits. If one of your children is a champion athlete and the others in the family are not so gifted, ensure that you have just as much time, energy and enthusiasm for their activities.
- ✓ Take a strong stand against smoking and drug use (both recreational and performance enhancing.) Set an example with sensible, responsible alcohol use.
- ✓ Encourage your children to find strong role models but try not to let this decision be based on sports only. Look for role models who consistently demonstrate integrity, humility, honesty and the ability to take responsibility for their own actions.
- ✓ Don’t compare your child’s achievement to another other children-good or bad. This creates barriers and resentment and we don’t need any more of that!
- ✓ Love them unconditionally (worth repeating!!)

## Advice for parents

The greatest gift you can give your talented child is to give them your support and help them take responsibility, keep their life in balance and strive for their sporting success.

## Expectations of yourselves as parents

Do you, as the performance parent:

- share the same philosophy and expectations as your child’s coach?
- communicate any concerns you have to your child’s coach?
- help your child’s coach when asked sometimes?
- show appreciation for your child’s coach?
- avoid contacting your child’s coach outside 'sport time' unless necessary?
- keep your child’s coach informed of any illness, injuries, school exams and planned holidays?
- make an effort to watch training and competitions?
- ensure your child has access to the right clothing and equipment?

## Helping your child balance their lifestyle;

- planning to make time for every area/aspect your child is involved with, especially rest and personal time as well as schoolwork
- planning ahead to identify hot spots (clashes and conflicts) in advance
- ensuring one coach has the full picture of all aspects of your child’s sporting activity or activities, both within and outside school
- never sacrificing rest and recovery time
- reviewing how things are going and making changes where necessary
- sharing plans with others (family, friends, school, coaches), and working with these people to resolve clashes.

## Teachers

- does your child’s teacher know what your child does in physical education (PE) and sport, especially commitments outside school?
- what can you do to improve understanding and communication between yourself and the teachers/school to manage conflicting demands on your child’s time?
- when did you last talk to your child’s teacher about your child’s sporting involvement and demands?

## Education issues and options

Qualifications count!

- what is your child going to achieve?
- when are they going to achieve it?
- timetable flexibility - is it something your child can obtain in secondary and tertiary education?

## Can you mix sport and education?

- consider what Specialist Sports Colleges can do
- what about the well known sporting universities?
- when does your child need to peak for important benchmark competitions/ tournaments?
- is now the time your child needs to be a full-time performer?
- how can your child best use their current time and opportunities to maximise their longevity after their professional career?
- what is your child’s realistic life span in sport?

## Tips on eating

### Does your child eat enough?

When training hard, and particularly during growth periods, your child will have higher energy requirements and needs to eat more.

### Does your child eat the right things?

Does your child eat at the right times?

- Always encourage your child to eat breakfast.
- Your child should eat within 30 minutes of finishing exercise (including every training session and competition), as this is the best time to refuel muscles and speed recovery.

### Does your child drink enough?

- Your child should drink at least two litres a day (a good indicator is when urine is straw-coloured and plentiful).
- Fluid is lost during exercise, and dehydration affects health as well as performance.
- Your child should keep sipping throughout the day, and not wait until they are thirsty.

- Your child should drink before, during, and after training and competition.
- Your child should take his/her own drink bottle everywhere, name it and not share it (sharing is a quick way to pass on germs).
- It is best for your child to drink plain or flavoured water, fruit squashes and juices.
- Limit the amount of fizzy drinks, tea and coffee that your child drinks.

## How much training should your child be doing?

There are no fixed rules as everyone has different starting points, strengths and weaknesses - and every sport is different!

### Train smarter:

- quality is more important than quantity, as quality is not only more effective, it has a lower injury risk.
- do a lighter training session if your child is tired or injured
- try not to do any training that may make an injury worse.
- Does your child get enough rest? Remember that rest is vital as it is when the body recovers from and adapts to training.
- Make sure your child has at least one complete rest day per week.

### Tips on tuning the mind

- Motivation and commitment should come from within (not from a parent or coach): your child should be driven by personal performance, not just winning.

- Goals should be set with (not for) your child, and should utilise the SMART principle (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Recorded and Time-framed).
- Encourage and reward positive sporting attitudes to keep your child motivated.
- Your child needs to tune their mind as well as their body to achieve their best performance.
- Through training, your child can improve skills like concentration, attention and anxiety control.
- All performers have an ideal level of readiness for competition, depending on their sport and individual personality.