

Kids, puberty & sports

Sports can be a great way for kids to develop social skills, teamwork and resilience. But it's important to know that athletic ability changes as kids grow.



GROWTH AFFECTS PERFORMANCE

During puberty, boys and girls have a growth spurt that can change their athletic ability. After going through puberty:

- Boys may notice more muscle strength and overall bigger body size.
- Girls often lose some muscle mass. They may temporarily lose some of their speed or agility.
- Kids could feel “clumsy” as they adjust to being taller. The brain hasn’t yet adjusted to this new height and may affect balance skills or body control.
- It may be harder to throw or hit a ball with longer arms.
- Girls may have headaches, mood swings or cramps during menstruation.



PUBERTY & KNEE INJURIES

As kids get taller and heavier, they have a higher risk of anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury. The ACL is an important ligament that supports the knee.

ACL injuries can be serious. They may require surgery and can increase the risk of knee arthritis later in life.

Most ACL injuries happen when a person suddenly stops, changes direction, jumps or lands on the ground. They don’t usually happen from a blow to the knee. Sometimes an ACL injury causes a “popping” sound as it occurs.

ACL injuries may cause swelling, severe pain, and inability to put weight on the knee. If your child injures their knee, see a doctor right away.



POSITIVE SUPPORT IS KEY

Coaches who know about the effects of puberty can help kids. In addition, parents can help their kids by being positive and supportive. Yelling at kids or being put down may cause them to quit their sport. Remember that changes caused by puberty are only temporary.

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics