

Practice Makes...Pain?

At 10, Courtney Thompson was a top-ranked gymnast in New Hampshire. She had been doing flips since she was one year old, and she had her heart set on competing in the Olympics. She practiced four and a half hours a day, six days a week, often repeating the same move 100 times.

Her demanding schedule took a toll. It got to the point where Courtney could barely straighten her elbows unless she put ice on them. On Jan. 12, 2005, she had to stop in the middle of a floor routine. "I jumped up and grabbed my arm," she told *Senior Edition*. "It hurt wicked bad."

Doctors discovered that Courtney's constant workouts had caused the cartilage, or connective tissue, in her elbow to separate from the bone. She had surgery on both arms and endured months of painful rehabilitation.

Courtney's experience is part of a growing trend in youth sports-severe injuries, once limited to professional athletes, are now showing up in kids and teens.

"We're starting to see 12-year-old kids look like 40- and 50-year-olds in terms of stress on their bodies," Roch King, a kids' volleyball coach, told reporters.

Experts say kids are pushing their bodies to the limit, practicing sports too hard for too long. The strenuous schedules often lead to dangerous injuries that could leave young athletes on the sidelines -permanently.

Under Strain

From 30 percent to 50 percent of youth sports injuries are due to overuse, according to experts at *The Physician and Sportsmedicine Journal*. Overuse injuries are caused by repetitive motion that, over time, puts more stress on a body part than it can withstand. The tissue or bone eventually breaks, stretches, or tears.

Danny Clark ended up with an overuse injury last year. The teen baseball player from Altamonte Springs, Florida, hurt himself by throwing 80 pitches in a single game after two months of not pitching at all.

The sudden, repetitive action tore Danny's rotator cuff. The rotator cuff is a group of four muscles and the tendons that connect them to bones in the shoulder. Afterward, he couldn't pitch for two months and needed five months of physical therapy.

Too Much, Too Soon

Experts say injuries such as Danny's are on the rise, in part because more and more kids are abandoning casual sports for organized team competitions that require hours of practice and game time. "Kids [are] playing sports more aggressively at younger ages," explains James Beaty, an

orthopedist in Memphis, Tennessee.

Kevin Butcher, a 15-year-old soccer player from Fort Collins, Colorado, is no exception. He plays soccer three or four times a week for nine months a year. His dedication pays off—last year he helped lead his team to a state championship. But his success came with a price.

"Last year, I sprained my ankle a few times, dislocated a bone in my foot, and broke both sides of my pelvis," Kevin told *Senior Edition*. The first time he broke his pelvis, Kevin didn't realize it for about a month. He played through the pain until doctors forced him to rest. When he dislocated a bone in his foot, a physical therapist popped the bone into place, bandaged his foot, and let him play the next day.

Knowing Your Limits

Not every kid who plays sports ends up with serious injuries. Experts say the key to avoiding injury is paying attention to your body. Feeling sore after practice is OK, but sharp pain is a warning sign that shouldn't be ignored.

Kevin learned that lesson while recovering from his second broken pelvis in less than a year. "There's definitely a glory in playing through pain, but I think there is a limit," he told *Senior Edition*. "You just have to know when to stop."

How to Stay Safe

Playing sports doesn't have to lead to injury. Here's how to stay in the game:

- Limit the time you spend playing a sport—no more than 15 hours a week.
- Increase the length and intensity of your training slowly. Never add more than 10 percent a week. If you ran for 20 minutes last week, you can run 22 minutes this week.
- Take a couple of days off from workouts every week.
- Consider *cross-training*, competing for fun in a variety of sports, to even out the stresses on your body.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What sport does Danny Clark play?

- A. baseball
- B. football
- C. soccer
- D. volleyball

2. The number of youth sports injuries is increasing. All of the following are causes EXCEPT

- A. kids are putting more stress on a body part than it can withstand
- B. kids have strenuous schedules to practice their sports
- C. kids are playing sports more aggressively at younger ages
- D. kids are limiting the time they spend playing a sport

3. What is the author trying to convey to the reader about Kevin Butcher by stating that "his success came with a price"?

- A. He was only successful because his parents paid for a personal trainer.
- B. He helped lead his team to a state championship by bribing the judges.
- C. He had success in soccer, but he paid for it with many injuries.
- D. It cost a lot of money to lead his team to a state soccer championship.

4. Read this sentence from the passage:

"She had surgery on both arms and endured months of painful rehabilitation."

In this sentence, the word **rehabilitation** means

- A. the act of waiting patiently
- B. a difficult competition
- C. a vaccine to prevent illness
- D. the process of recovery

5. Which statement best describes the main idea of this passage?

- A. Playing team sports always leads to injuries.
- B. Many kids like playing casual and team sports.
- C. Courtney Thompson was a top-ranked gymnast.
- D. Youth sports injuries are a growing trend.

6. What is cartilage?

7. Before Courtney Thompson became injured, she practiced four and a half hours a day, six days a week, often repeating the same gymnastic move 100 times. What does this say about Courtney as a person?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Organized team sports include games such as soccer, volleyball, football, _____ baseball.

- A. and
- B. for
- C. nor
- D. but

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. The author wrote this passage

- A. to warn about the dangers of exercising too much.
- B. to inform about injuries associated with strenuous exercise.
- C. to report the increase of sports related injuries in children.
- D. all of the above.

2. The statement that Kevin Butcher's "success came with a price" means:

- A. Kevin enjoyed playing soccer.
- B. Kevin became a star soccer player, but he injured himself in the process.
- C. Kevin had to pay a lot of money to learn to play soccer.
- D. Kevin helped lead his team to a state championship.

3. When someone is "pushing her body to the limit," it means

- A. she needs to exercise more.
- B. she loves gymnastics.
- C. she is committed to winning in the Olympics.
- D. she is exercising until she is in danger of damaging her body.

4. When Kevin Butcher told the author, "There's definitely a glory in playing through pain," he meant:

- A. A person is admired for continuing to play after being injured.
- B. It can be painful to participate in sports.
- C. Often it is the team with the most injuries that wins the game.
- D. Coaches want their athletes to ignore pain.

5. What is the main idea of this article?