

AVOIDING BASEBALL-RELATED INJURIES

Because baseball consists of so many repetitive movements, overuse injuries are common—even in young athletes. Athletes who throw too hard, too much or too early and without rest are putting their elbows and shoulders at risk of injury. Although common, overuse injuries can be avoided.

Understanding UCL Risks

- Pitchers, in particular, are at risk of damaging their ulnar collateral ligament (UCL), a thick triangular band found in the elbow and the main stabilizer of the elbow for the throwing motion.
- When bad enough, UCL reconstruction may be necessary. This is known as Tommy John surgery.
- During a Tommy John surgery, a ligament in the medial elbow is replaced with a tendon from elsewhere in the body—usually the forearm, hamstring or foot.
- 83 to 97 percent of major and minor league players who had Tommy John surgery returned to pitching.
- Recovery after surgery takes anywhere from 11 to 20 months.

Staying Safe on the Baseball Diamond

- Avoid specializing in one sport.
- Work to strengthen your rotator cuff, scapular muscles and core.
- Follow a warm-up routine that allows you to gradually increase distance and velocity.
- Don't play on multiple baseball teams during a season.
- Take at least six weeks off from throwing after the season is finished.
- Develop a preseason throwing program/long toss program.
- Talk with your coaches and athletic trainer about any arm pain you experience.
- Follow your league's pitch-count guidelines.
- Focus on proper body mechanics, command and accuracy when throwing.
- Pay attention to your posture, range of motion and flexibility.

Source: NATA, Andrews Institute Orthopaedics & Sports Medicine, American Journal of Sports Medicine