

How much activity is too much? That is the question

Now that's a good question!

Over the last few of my columns, I've discussed things like drugs and sports, high performance kids and the demands of their schedules. Even active rec-

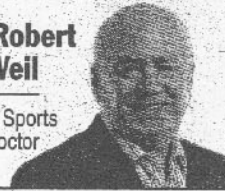
reational athletes can push their bodies a little too much - people are exercising, walking, jogging and going to the gym and the result is that overuse injuries to the lower extremities are skyrocketing.

The flip side of this is that these active lifestyles are helping to control obesity and increase wellness and fitness. Despite many in our society becoming more active and health and nutrition conscious, American children and adults are still falling further behind in the battle against obesity. We've got to keep pushing to educate people, especially parents, about this struggle. The costs of health concerns associated with inactivity and obesity are staggering - they'll break us! So stay active and pay attention to better nutrition habits. Keep gym classes in schools.

With the huge amounts of walkers, runners and aerobics over the past 10 to 20 years, we've seen increases in foot, ankle, shin and knee problems. This is true whether we're looking at the adult, especially baby boomer recreation athletes, or kids with club, traveling

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or school team demands. Shoe technology has come a long way in all sports, especially in running and walking. Also, it seems that the specific shoes for all sports have taken a big step up. Better support, shock absorption and conformance to specific weights are examples. Proper fit, as obvious as it sounds, is still important, so always make sure you and your children are measured and fit properly.

Foot mechanics and foot type often are one of the causes of persistent overuse problems. In many screenings and evaluations of athletes with ongoing or persistent lower extremity

overuse, we see the flat or overpronating foot type. Flat feet are susceptible to strain to ankles, arches and heels. Over rotation of the lower legs or twisting of the knees can show up as compensating motions related to these foot imbalances. Shin splints or tendonitis can be the result. Identifying your foot type or your youngster's can help in prevention of many overuse problems.

How much is too much? If you or the young athletes are consistently sore, if overuse injuries stay with you, then evaluate the schedule. Are you running every day without enough recovery time? Are the kids keeping year-round athletic schedules? Do you need pain medicine or anti-inflammatories just to keep going?

Intelligent rest is one of my favorite terms. Getting athletes to back off isn't easy. Somehow, the culture of playing hurt, sucking it

up or pushing through pain has filtered down even to children 10 to 12 years old.

Sports can really take a toll on young, growing bodies. If your child is constantly complaining of pain or discomfort, pay attention! Check with a sports-related doctor or therapist. Better strengthening, more sensible schedules, proper shoes for foot type or just more intelligent rest might be all that is needed to solve the problem.

Exercise, fitness and sports should be enjoyable and positive. Being injured, constantly tired, sore or fatigued is not.

We've got to listen to our bodies.

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