

**LET'S TALK
ABOUT**

**A SAFE RETURN
TO SCHOOL &
SPORT**

A PARENT GUIDE



**kids back
@sport**



HOW TO GET CHILDREN SAFELY BACK TO SPORT

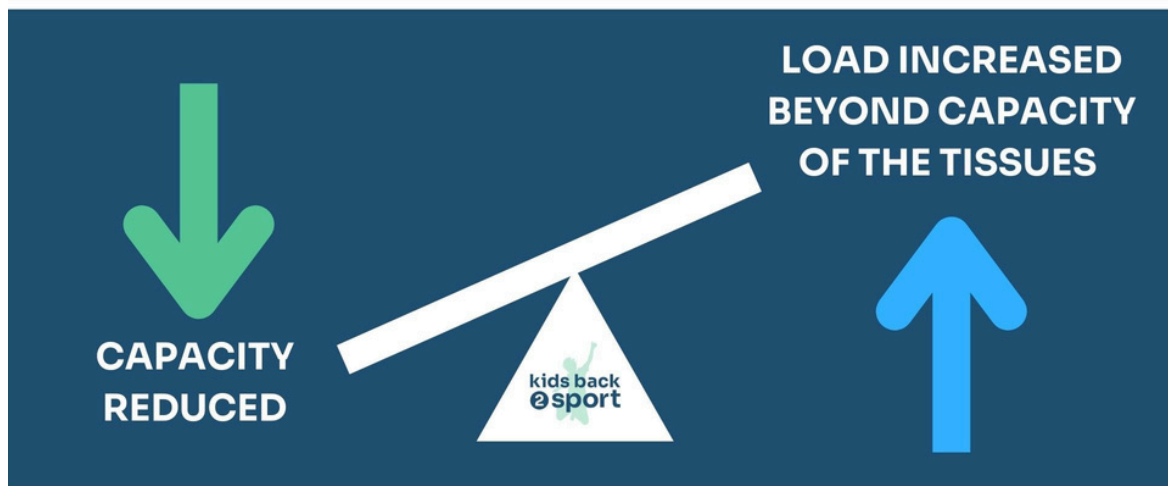
The highest number of injuries in young athletes occurs in the first few weeks of any new term or season when growing bodies start to feel the effects of “too much too soon” on their return to sport.

After the long summer holidays, children who have not played sport for many weeks will be ill prepared for the sudden onslaught of sport that greets them on a return to school. All too often we see a sudden spike in activity, be that through preseason camps, club trials and county selection processes. Injuries occur when we create a demand on the body that exceeds it's current capacity. This may be through a sudden increase in activity compared to what has been trained for, or a drop in the capacity of the child due to a reduction in sleep, energy intake, fitness or perhaps an increase in stress, or a rapid growth spurt.

During time away from sport, the child's bones and muscles may have become less tolerant of loading. If there is a sudden spike in volume or intensity compared to what has been trained for in recent weeks, the body takes measures to try and strengthen itself through building new bone and muscle. This new immature tissue takes time to become strong enough to withstand sporting loads and can become overloaded resulting in injury.

The peak in injuries occurs in the third week of a school term or season when the body is desperately trying to reinforce the bones and tendons to withstand the new loading, but the demand outstrips the pace of adaptation.

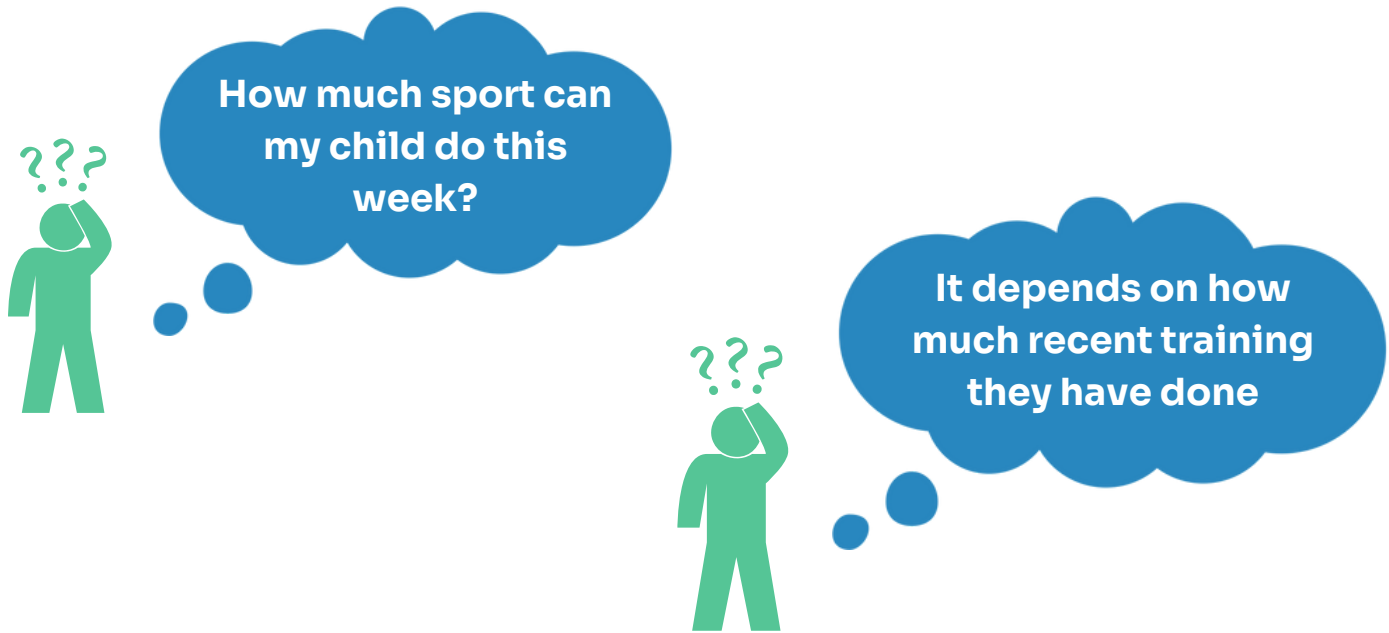
INJURIES OCCUR WHEN WE EXCEED THE CAPACITY OF THE BODY



**INJURIES AND ILLNESS OCCUR WITH NOT TOO MUCH
BUT DOING...
TOO MUCH,
TOO SOON**

WHERE DO I START?

HOW MUCH DO THEY WANT TO DO?



It is worth spending some time planning the return to sport schedule on a calendar so the child is prepared for what lies ahead. Start by chatting to them about:

1. What sports they want to do
2. How often they want to play
3. What level they want to play at

Make sure you have a discussion about when they are going to be able to schedule in recovery time, school work time and importantly time for friends and family.

HOW MANY STEPS A DAY DO THEY DO AT SCHOOL?

One of the surprising things parents rarely consider is how many steps their child does per day just walking to and from school and around the school site. This can often exceed 15,000 steps and yet during a typical beach type holiday, the child's step count may drop to as low as 5000 steps a day or less. This means that even just the walking component of their school day can cause a spike in activity that can flare up pain in the foot and knee, especially if that child goes to a school with lots of sets of stairs.

Many children will have their phone in their pocket all day and so the phone records their activity level. Once you know what their average step count is, you can start to build up their tolerance with adding in increasingly longer walks until they have reached the level they will need to be at by the time school starts again.



WHERE DO I START?

How quickly children can return to sport is very individual. Depending on current fitness levels, coupled with factors such as how long they have played a specific sport for affects how quickly they can build back up their volume and intensity of activities.

We used to think that children could play the same number of hours sport per week as their age. For example, a child of 11 could play 11 hours sport a week but this is not true. A child of 11 may have the maturity of a child 2-3 years older or younger and therefore not all 11 year olds are the same. A child of 11 who has done several weeks of preseason training is better prepared than one who hasn't. Equally, a child of 11 in a growth spurt, who doesn't prioritise good sleep and nutrition will have a lower capacity than another child who does. They are all different, with their own unique capacity, and that capacity changes day on day. In addition, if the child has already been playing a specific sport for 5 years, their body will have built up more resilience and adapt better to the loading than someone new to the game. They can therefore tolerate greater fluctuations in training load.

How much they can do is dependent upon how much they have done in recent weeks and their current state of wellness, fitness and preparedness.

Calculate:

HOW MUCH HAVE THEY DONE IN THE LAST 3-4 WEEKS?

TAKE THE AVERAGE OF THE LAST 4 WEEKS

HOW WELL DID THEY COPE WITH IT?

IF THEY COPE WELL LAST WEEK - ADD APPROX 10% MORE PER WEEK

PLAN THE TERM: BETTER TO START SLOW, THAN NOT AT ALL

If they have not trained for the sport they play, start slowly adding activities one at a time and observe how well they cope. Make sure you factor in recovery days especially in the first few weeks.

Week 1

1. Start with school PE & games
2. Avoid back to back days of high intensity activity
3. Add one lunch or after-school activity

Week 2:

1. Increase school activity
2. Add club activities
3. Add more intensity

If they have coped well with the return to sport, continue to track their wellness and tiredness and adjust their volume and intensity accordingly.



PLAN AHEAD

Injuries occur when the current activity level exceeds the body's capacity. This often occurs when there is a sudden spike in activity. To avoid this, make a list of all the times in the season when spikes of activity might occur. It is not just the start of the season, multiple other factors can create spikes in load that have the potential to cause a problem.

Have a look at the list below and then think about the different activities your child does and when potential bottlenecks might happen. In preparation for a period of higher volume or intensity, gradually build up what they are doing so the event becomes much less of a spike and the athlete is better able to cope.

If they have left it too late to prepare for the spike in activity, they can increase their capacity to do more through better sleep, energy intake and adjusting how hard they work in each session.

PLANNING AHEAD FOR WHAT EVENTS ARE IN THE CALENDAR MEANS YOU CAN HELP THE CHILD PREPARE FOR THE INCREASE IN LOAD AND AVOID SUDDEN UNPLANNED SPIKES IN ACTIVITY

Causes of spikes in activity

- Post long holidays
- Post injury or illness
- Pre-season training camps
- Start of a new season
- Overlapping seasons
- New sports or activities
- Fixture postponement
- Calendar congestion
- Sports tours & camps
- Changes to technique
- Changes in format
- Equipment changes



WHAT TO DO IF THEY HAVEN'T DONE THE TRAINING?

Children who have not prepared for the demands of the new term or season are faced with either doing less to stay injury free, pacing themselves better, or increasing their capacity to cope better with what they do.

Children who work at maximal intensity require more energy intake to fuel their activity and often need greater recovery. Smart athletes vary the intensity of activity throughout the week having some lighter days interspersed with harder sessions. If children are taught to vary their intensity using a scale like the 1-10 values in the picture, they can learn to reduce how hard they work in certain less important sessions and save their energy for when it matters. On days when they are tired or struggling, they can reduce the intensity of activity, or reduce down the number of sessions per week, avoiding back to back days so that the body can recover and build up energy reserves again.

NOT ALL SESSIONS ARE EQUAL

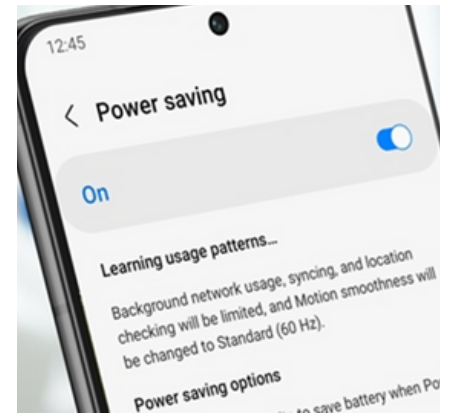
- 10 🤢 Jelly legs.. I am going to throw up
- 9 😓 WOW starting not to enjoy this
- 8 🤔 Can't keep this up for long
- 7 🥵 Sweating buckets and panting
- 6 😓 Breathless and sweaty
- 5 😊 Getting warm, breathing heavier
- 4 😊 Sweating a little but can chat away
- 3 😊 I am enjoying this
- 2 😎 Can keep going all day
- 1 😴 Still half asleep

HOW TO BOOST THEIR CAPACITY TO DO MORE

Very few children who love their sport would be happy to be told to do less of what they enjoy. So, how do we boost their capacity to tolerate more?

Adopt the 4 R's recovery approach:

1. Recharge and rest
2. Refuel
3. Rehydrate
4. Repair and grow



RECHARGE AND REST

Just like our phones need to be recharged so does our brain and body. In the deep part of our sleep, we perform many of the same functions achieved by plugging our phone in to the mains. We perform vital updates, virus scans, repair damaged tissues, build stronger muscles and bones and upload skills learnt in the day to the hard drive.

Children need more sleep during growth spurts and will be more tired when they return to school, so make sure they are getting lots of early nights and feel refreshed in the morning.

REFUEL

If sporty children do not eat enough for what they do, they will prioritise where the available energy is spent. The essential functions like the heart and lungs grasp what they can for survival and the child uses what they need to play sport. But what about “non-essential” survival systems like immunity, digestion, growth and reproduction? Energy may start to get diverted from these systems and the child may start to feel regularly tired, ill or injured. Getting adequate nutritional intake and recovery for the level of activity that the child does is important for good bone health and growing stronger muscles.

It is important to plan ahead to ensure you have energy rich snacks and meals prepared for days when their sporting load is greater and especially during growth spurts. Add an extra sandwich packed with chicken, tuna, cheese or eggs, with added avocado, cream cheese, or mayonnaise for greater energy intake. Many children don't feel hungry in the morning, but it is difficult to achieve adequate energy intake if children miss breakfast.

Many children require a Vitamin D supplement to improve bone health so discuss appropriate dosage with a health professional.

REHYDRATE

Children need to take on fluid little and often. They may often report hunger but quite often this is a sign of dehydration rather than hunger. Help them to create good routines about having water at school and during training and keep water bottles filled in the car. Many children use energy drinks which can be helpful during sessions lasting longer than 90 minutes, on hot days or sports involving high intensity but try to avoid these at night and make sure children wash down with water after drinking energy drinks to protect their teeth.

HOW TO BOOST CAPACITY TO DO MORE

REPAIR AND GROW

When the volume or intensity of physical activity exceeds the body's capacity, it triggers a protective response. Bones and muscles, exposed to sudden spikes in activity, attempt to reinforce themselves by laying down new tissue. This process occurs after sporting activity, not during, and in the deepest parts of sleep, so factoring in rest days and recovery time and prioritising sleep is key to successful energy management.

Some children seem to grow without experiencing too many problems with injury or coordination. However, for others, especially those who have an excessively large or fast growth spurt, it can be a miserable experience. Energy required for growth can reduce the capacity of the young athlete. There is simply less in the tank, and they may not be able to tolerate the same level of exercise intensity or volume as usual and be more at risk of developing an injury.

Stronger children appear to get fewer injuries. They are more resilient to fluctuations in training load so encourage children to do regular strength exercises. Technique is paramount so ensure that they are given a lesson in resistance training by a coach with experience in adolescent athletes.

TEACH THEM TO LISTEN TO THEIR BODY

SHOULD I TRAIN OR NOT?



If the child is coping with what they are doing in terms of activities, there is no need to reduce their activity level down. If they are starting to get recurrent sore throats, or are grumpy or sore, it is a sign they are not coping with their current workload. They may need more fuel, or recovery and adaptation days to avoid tipping over in to injury or illness. At times when they are ill, sore, stressed or tired, it is important to teach children to listen to their body. Ask them before training to grade their wellness on a score of 1-5 where 5 is positive and 1 is negative for the following areas:

1. How sore
2. How tired
3. How stressed or well

You can use their average score to help them understand whether they should train and how hard. If they score high, they can train hard, or a moderate score might suggest they should train light and focus on more tactical or technical development. Low scores would suggest that they should miss training and go home for an early night.

Better one session missed, than a season lost through injury.

THIS MATERIAL IS THE EXPERIENCE AND OPINIONS OF PHYSIOTHERAPIST, ANGELA JACKSON FROM KIDS BACK 2 SPORT LIMITED. NO LIABILITY CAN BE GIVEN FOR THE CONTENT OR HOW IT IS USED. IF YOUR PAIN DOES NOT SETTLE WITHIN A FEW WEEKS OR AFFECTS YOUR SLEEP, SEEK THE HELP OF A QUALIFIED HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WITH EXPERIENCE IN TREATING CHILDREN. THIS INFORMATION SHOULD NOT BE REPRODUCED OR ALTERED IN ANY WAY WITHOUT THE EXPRESS PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR.

www.kidsback2sport.com