# What Are We Doing to Address Adolescent Injuries In Sports?

Recent articles have highlighted the rise in adolescent injuries in sports. Most attribute this rise to the repetitive stresses associated with specific sport training, muscular imbalances, and inadequately trained coaches. Although the articles are illuminating, the main question still remains unanswered, "What are we doing to address adolescent injuries in sports?" Although there is no simple answer to this question there are simple steps we should be taking to protect our youth. First, a professional should administer a Functional Movement Screen (FMS) to all adolescents participating in organized sports. Second, the professional should provide a tailored strength and conditioning program based on the results of the FMS. This professionally monitored process should result in an increase in athletic performance and a vast reduction in the risk of injury.

A FMS is essential in the prevention of adolescent injuries. The FMS evaluates the quality of an athlete's Range of Motion (ROM) using a series of 7 different tests. Any basic movement imbalances noted in the FMS can be specifically addressed and eventually improved with the proper corrective exercises. The FMS movements are best assessed by a qualified professional who has been trained to evaluate the stability of each joint in the kinetic chain; and the athlete's ability to move through a full range of motion and mobility. The information gathered from the FMS is then used to develop fundamental movements the athlete needs to use in order to excel in their sport and also in their activities of daily life.

In today's technologically advanced society we spend much of our time in ergonomically compromised positions, such as, sitting in front of a computer. Poor posture, along with the gravitational forces associated with daily life, results in compromised joint alignment, a decrease in mobility, and an increase in muscular imbalances. As adults, many of us have lost the skills we had as adolescents. Our ability to perform a squat through a full range of motion (think of a toddler) is generally long gone by the time we reach high school. Many adults have even lost the ability to touch their toes or cross their legs. If the proper movement patterns were taught at an early age these limitations might never occur, thus, preventing more serious issues later in life; such as arthritis, disc herniations, and ligament tears.

After an adolescent athlete's FMS is complete, a professional should design a tailored strength and conditioning program. The goal of the program should be to correct an adolescent athlete's weak areas identified in the FMS. An effective program should address proper biomechanics, an increase in power potential and a decrease in the risk of injury to overstressed muscles. In addition, an effective program should not only include balance and flexibility techniques but it should include regeneration techniques to aid in the adolescent athlete's recovery following an athletic event.

Educating our adolescent athletes is the primary tool to reduce their risk of injury. The FMS and a specific strength and conditioning program will provide them with the education required to become more physically self-aware. The more they know about how to eliminate their specific physical imbalances and master techniques for their own

muscle regeneration, the better they will be able to avoid injury. We should motivate each adolescent athlete to be true champions by providing them with the proper education. The power from this knowledge will enable them to address their weaknesses head on and work to overcome them in order to reach their full potential, injury free.

*Dr. EJ Zebro, DC, CSCS is the owner of Integrated Sports Therapy and the Director of Performance at FAST Fitness, both located at 1300 Post Road in Westport, CT. He can be reached at info@westportist.com if you have questions regarding the FMS.*