



## **Young Pitching Arms Need Lots of TLC**

By Bill Gosse

Posted July 19, 2008

One of my greatest concerns as a coach, parent and fan of youth baseball is the use of young pitchers.

Dr. James Andrews – one of the nations’ leading orthopedic surgeons for knee, elbow and shoulder injuries – is an expert on what causes injuries in young pitchers. His passion is to help prevent the injuries he treats. He hates seeing kids unable to play baseball because of improper guidance, and he has seen throwing surgeries increase sixfold over the last ten years.

Coaches and parents need to find answers to three simple questions.

### **1. How Many Pitches Should My Child Be Allowed To Throw?**

Andrews contends pitch count should be determined by age. Many youth leagues have limits for pitchers, but they usually are based on innings or outs.

For pitchers age 8-10 he recommends 50 pitches a game and 75 per week. Eleven- and 12 year olds should be allowed 75 pitches per game and 100 for the week. Thirteen- and 14-year olds should also be limited to 75 pitches per game, but Andrews feels they can handle 125 pitches per week. Pitchers age 15 and older should be allowed 90 to 105 pitches in each of two games per week.

### **2. How Old Should My Child Be Before Throwing Breaking Balls?**

Andrews recommends throwing only fastballs at age 8 and adding the change-up by age 10. He suggests curve balls wait until age 14 and sliders until 16. Andrews feels young pitchers shouldn’t throw breaking balls in competitions until they shave (i.e. they’ve reached puberty). By this time, the growth plates should be closed and a player’s bones matured.

### **3. Can A Pitcher’s Mechanics Cause Or Prevent Injury?**

Young pitchers need to develop proper mechanics as soon as possible. Many pitchers fail to use their entire body when pitching. They want to rear back and fire, and they fail to drive with their legs, putting strain on elbows and shoulders. Following through is vital.

One point Dr. Andrews emphasizes is a pitcher should not be allowed to return to the mound in a game in which he or she has been removed as the pitcher. This would eliminate the possibility of coaches having their star pitcher rotate in and out, only throwing to the better part of their opponent's batting order.

The main risk factors Andrews identifies are year-round throwing, seasonal overuse, game overuse, early breaking pitches, and inadequate warm-ups.

When more than eighty pitches are thrown in a game, the risk of a young pitcher needing surgery by age 20 is increased 380 percent. When a child throws more than eight months per year, the risk goes up 500 percent. Finally, when a young pitcher continues to throw while fatigued, the risk of needing surgery goes up 3,600 percent.

Avoid too little throwing and physical activity, but most importantly avoid too much competitive pitching.

Attention parents and coaches, young pitchers need proper guidance!