



# LITTLE LEAGUE SHOULDER

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Little league shoulder (proximal humeral epiphysitis) is an overuse injury of the shoulder.

## What is it?

- Inflammation of the growth plate at a part of the arm bone (humerus) closest to the shoulder
- Unique to young throwers, who still have open growth plates.
- Caused by the repetitive traction and torsion force on the growth plate that occurs with hard throwing

## What are the symptoms?

- Pain during and after throwing. Onset of pain can be sudden or gradual
- Worsens with increased volume or intensity (trying to throw harder)
- Pain after throwing can last several days, even with rest from throwing
- Pain is typically located on the upper arm, near the shoulder
- Symptoms of weakness in the shoulder with less control and velocity in throws is also common

## How is little league shoulder diagnosed?

- A thorough history and exam can often identify the diagnosis
- Widening of the growth plate may be seen on x-ray. Comparison views of the uninjured shoulder may be helpful
- In persistent cases, imaging with an MRI may be indicated to differentiate this injury from other shoulder injuries in throwers, such as rotator cuff injuries

### **What is the treatment for little league shoulder?**

- Rest is the most effective treatment for little league shoulder
- Duration of rest depends on the severity of the injury and age of the athlete
  - o Healing can take 3 months or longer in some cases
- The first phase of treatment is complete rest from throwing,
  - o Some other sport specific activity may be allowed during this time
- Once the bony tenderness has resolved, physical therapy may be used to strengthen the shoulder muscles for a return to throwing
- After healing, a specific return to throw program should be used to slowly build up the shoulder's endurance.

### **Are there long term consequences?**

- With proper rest and rehabilitation, full return to activity is expected
  - o Patience is the key to prevent recurrence

### **How can it be prevented?**

- Adhere to pitch count and rest day recommendations
- Stop pitching if there is pain. The earlier little league shoulder is diagnosed, the shorter the recovery time.



**Christine R. Boyd, MD**, is a pediatric sports medicine specialist with an extensive background in both athletics and medicine. Her office is located in LifeStyleRx, ValleyCare's wellness facility in Livermore. To make an appointment, call **925-454-3090**.

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