

THROWING Injuries

Throwing injuries are common at all ages. They can range from strained muscles to tears and even fractures. Injuries mostly occur at the elbow or shoulder and vary based on age and sport. Baseball is the most common cause of throwing injury, in particular pitching. It is a very stressful motion for the arm and often occurs in younger players who throw too often, too much and with poor mechanics. The velocity of a pitch comes from the lower body and if proper mechanics are not used (either from a lack of training or a lack of physical capability) then injuries will occur. This happens as the arm become the generator of velocity and leads to stress on ligaments, tendons, cartilage and bone. In kids, growth plate stress fractures are common. In adults, labral tears and rotator cuff tears are more common. Around the elbow, kids can get growth plate injury or cartilage damage. Adults typically get tendonitis/ tendon tears, ligament tears, bone spurs, loose bodies and occasionally a stress fracture.

Treatment is almost always successful without surgery if it is caught early and mechanics corrected during the rehab process. Rehab can take months to accomplish and can be frustrating as time off from throwing is required. Once fully recovered, a gradual (2-3 month) return to throwing is required to avoid recurrence. Surgeries are more common when the injury progress to full tears or high grade partial tears. Recovery can take 6 months or more and return to throwing can be as long as 18-24 months. Many times, even with successful surgery, throwing cannot be resumed to the same level as before the injury.

Weekend warrior throwers (throwing hard to your kids or in adult leagues) when adequate conditioning is absent leads to injury more often. Prevention is the key and knowing your limits. Avoid throwing hard (flashback from younger years) use proper mechanics and maintain shoulder muscle strength (rotator cuff, scapula) and overall conditioning. TOCA has several fellowship-trained physicians with extensive experience and expertise in throwing injuries.