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YOUTH BASEBALL RECOMMENDATIONS

When can I throw a curve ball?

A breaking ball brings another dimension to a pitcher and sometimes more won games. But, when is it safe for young arms to throw these pitches? Recently at the Injuries in Baseball Conference in Atlanta, Dr. Joseph Chandler, team physician for the Atlanta Braves, shared insights regarding what top level players and coaches recommend when asked how they would introduce new pitches to their children. The results were:

Pitch Type	Average Age to begin throwing the pitch
Change-up	11.6
Curve	14.8
Slider	17

NOTE: The change-up would be the second pitch youngsters would throw in youth leagues. The curve would be taught in junior high school. The slider would be introduced in high school competition.

Youth coaches routinely introduce breaking pitches at an earlier age. This eagerness may call on young pitchers to perform at levels that exceed their capabilities. Even if they can throw a “curve ball”, poor body mechanics and lack of development may increase injury rates. Young pitchers should be allowed to develop their fastballs and their arms normally over the course of many seasons of competition.

NOTE: Introducing the curve or slider too soon increases elbow and shoulder injury rates in young athletes.

How many pitches should my child throw?

Although muscle soreness is normal in a pitcher’s development, joint pain is not. The risk of using breaking pitches is magnified for the young athlete because growth plates in the elbow and shoulder are still open and more susceptible to stress-related injuries. Most youth baseball organizations have pitch inning regulations. However, since the number of pitches thrown per inning varies among pitchers, most experts agree that regulating the number of pitches in a game would be safer. Coaches and parents should listen and react when a youth pitcher complains about arm pain. A pitcher who complains or shows signs of arm pain during a game should be removed immediately from pitching. Parents should seek medical attention if pain is not better within four days or if the pain recurs immediately the next time the player pitches. The USA Baseball Medical and Safety Advisory Committee recommends players age 8-18 should be limited to two pitching appearances per week and the following number of pitches per game:

Age	Number of Pitches/Game	Type of Pitches Allowed
8-10	50	Fast Ball
11-12	70	Fast Ball, Change-up
13	75	Fast Ball, Change-up
14	75	Fast Ball, Change-up, Curve Ball
15	90	Fast Ball, Change-up, Curve Ball, Knuckle Ball
16	90	Fast Ball, Change-up, Curve Ball, Knuckle Ball, Slider, Fork Ball
17	105	Fast Ball, Change-up, Curve Ball, Knuckle Ball, Slider, Fork Ball, Screw Ball
18	105	Fast Ball, Change-up, Curve Ball, Knuckle Ball, Slider, Fork Ball, Screw Ball

Baseball pitchers should not compete in baseball more than nine months in any given year, as a period of rest is necessary for a pitcher’s body to recover. For at least three months a year, a pitcher should not play any baseball, participate in throwing drills or other stressful overhead sport (javelin throwing, football quarterback, softball, competitive swimming, etc.) to minimize his risk of future arm injury and maximize his chance of success.

Baseball is a great sport, but the amount of major operations to youth players for shoulder and elbow problems has risen steadily over the last ten years. Hopefully, these recent recommendations can help your young athletes stay on the baseball diamond and out of the doctor’s office.