



U.S. COUNCIL FOR  
ATHLETES' HEALTH



## IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP IN ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

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As summer break winds down across the country, now is the time to get your children back into their school year sleep routines. The all-to-common “late nights and late mornings” are at an end. Getting the proper amount of sleep is essential for growth, allowing your child’s body to recover and repair from the day’s activities. The functions of sleep are particularly important for young, developing athletes, who are practicing daily – a good night’s rest can make all the difference in their success both athletically and academically.

### **How does sleep helps optimize sports performance?**

Many people understand how sleep affects the developing brain. But for a high-performing young athlete, getting enough sleep is critical for their developing body. The first four hours of sleep are dominated by physical recovery, where more than 50% of your daily growth hormone is released, allowing the body to repair, recover, and optimize training adaptations such as increased muscle growth, strength, and power. The last four hours of sleep are dominated by the mental recovery phase, which is important in the development of short and long-term memory, processing, and cognitive function. This phase keeps the mind sharp. When striving to reach peak performance, sleep is a critical component – just as critical as hydration, conditioning, nutrition and mental preparation.

### **Can getting enough sleep help reduce the risk of injury in young athletes?**

Yes! Making sure young athletes get enough sleep each day reduces their risk of injury from both a mental clarity and physical recovery perspective. For example, adequate sleep improves reaction time and accuracy, and reduces mental errors. Restful sleep also allows the body to recover fully, repair and regenerate cells after workouts, all of which reduces the risk of injury.

### **How can getting enough sleep benefit a young athlete’s development?**

In addition to the mental benefits of adequate sleep, athletes getting enough sleep will also see better physical results from training. Lack of sleep, on the other hand, causes fatigue, leading to impairments in cognitive and motor performance, thus slowing reaction time. Sleep loss impairs judgment, motivation, focus, memory and learning. Without sleep, the brain struggles to consolidate memory and absorb new knowledge.

# The Impact of Sleep in Youth Athletics



High quality sleep leads to better athletic performance. Getting the recommended hours of sleep is critical to young athletes, but balancing school, sports, and daily life can create a busy schedule that makes it harder to get quality sleep. The risks of sleep deprivation can impact an athlete in and out of practice.

## Consequences of Sleep Deprivation



Higher Risk of Injury



Reduced Reaction Time



Increased Stress and Anxiety



Low Energy Levels



Decreased Mental Performance



### Recommended Hours of Sleep

Preschool (3-5 years old)	10-13 hours
School-age (6-12 years old)	9-11 hours
Teen (13-17 years old)	8-10 hours

### FUN FACT

A 2011 study found that basketball players getting two hours more of sleep each night boosted their speed by 5% and their shooting accuracy by 9%.

The body requires sleep to support your growth, learning, and mental health. Athletes that get more sleep perform better, including:

- **Optimized performance** with improved speed, accuracy, and endurance
- **Improved cognitive function**, making you more alert and energized
- **Stronger immunity** that helps defend against illness and infections



## Tips to Improve Sleep

1. **Reduce technology use before bed** like phones, laptops, and other bright devices.
2. **Maintain consistent bedtime routines** that help you wind down and relax before bed.
3. **Talk about making schedule adjustments** and consider scaling back your obligations.



Pressure to excel academically and athletically can result in poor sleep and ultimately poor performance. By making improvements to your sleep, you allow your body time to recover and prepare for the next practice.

Sleep.org

With all the resources spent on training, equipment and physical recovery, it's interesting to note one of the best ways to help your child prepare for tomorrow begins tonight – and it's free.

<https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/can-sleep-enhance-athletic-performance>

<https://thesleepdoctor.com/children/sleep-and-athletic-performance/>

Kevin Gorey is a Senior Director at the U.S. Council for Athletes' Health (USCAH). Kevin brings extensive experience from both commercial health care and sports medicine to the USCAH team. His three-decades long professional experience has produced high-level results for the organizations he has had the privilege to work with.

USCAH was founded upon the need for trusted, independent athletic health care partners with the experience and expertise to advise and consult with organizations regarding their healthcare delivery system. This is why USCAH is committed to providing independent and unbiased medical expertise to organizations and individuals dedicated to the optimal health and safety for the athletes they serve. If your team or organization would like to learn more about sleep and other health & safety issues, please reach out to [kgorey@uscah.com](mailto:kgorey@uscah.com) or visit [www.uscah.com](http://www.uscah.com).