



## Skateboarding Injuries

Skateboarding is an evolving sport. Children and teens participate for recreation and competition. As its popularity has increased, so has the number of young athletes treated for skateboarding injuries. Education and prevention are vital to keeping your young athlete on the board and out of the emergency room.

### Common Injuries

According to the National Safety Council, first-time “boarders” (those skating for less than a week) account for one-third of the 50,000 skateboarding injuries treated each year in emergency departments. Head injuries, including concussions, pose the greatest danger to young athletes. These can involve time in a hospital, permanent impairment, and, in extreme cases, even death.

Young skateboarders are at greater risk of severe injury because they have a higher center of gravity, poor balance, slower reaction times, and less coordination than adults. They often overestimate their skill and may not judge barriers, ramps, and traffic appropriately.

Skateboarders may lose their balance and fall on an outstretched hand, wrist, or shoulder injuries. Ankle fractures are also common.

### Causes of Injury

The most serious accidents happen when a boarder loses control and falls or runs into a car, road hazard, pedestrian, bicyclist, or another skateboarder. They also may run into trouble by attempting tricks beyond their skill level or skating on improper or irregular surfaces.

### Preventing Injuries

Young athletes should always wear proper protective gear in good condition to reduce the risks. This includes closed, slip-resistant shoes; an appropriately fitted helmet; and pads for knees, elbows, and hands.

### Fitting a helmet

The best style and fit of a helmet is different for everyone. All helmets should meet or exceed the safety standards of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission or the Snell Memorial Foundation. The skateboarder should try on several styles and sizes to find one that fits correctly and securely.

A properly fitting helmet:

- is worn flat on the head with the bottom edge parallel to the ground;
- sits low on the forehead;
- has side straps that form a “V” around each ear;
- has a buckle that fastens tightly, with room to put only two fingers between the helmet strap and the chin;
- has pads that can be added to or removed from the inside, so the helmet fits snugly;
- does not move in any direction when the wearer shakes his/her head; and
- does not interfere with movement, vision, or hearing.

Replace the helmet at least every five years or when it is damaged or outgrown.

### Learning to fall

If they rehearse falling, young athletes can practice their coordination and reaction time and lessen their impact with the ground. When starting to fall, skateboarders should crouch down on the board to reduce the distance to the ground. They should try to roll and use their arms to absorb the force of the fall.

### Learning to stop

Skateboarders should be well versed in stopping before they skate on a sidewalk or cul-de-sac, at a skate park, and especially around traffic.

Foot-braking is the first “trick” to learn when boarding.

- Turn the front foot forward in line with the board. The chest and face should be turned forward as well.
- Transfer weight to the front foot and keep it centered on that foot without leaning back or forward. At the same time, swing out the back leg, keeping it straight. Lower the back leg to the ground.

- Apply light pressure to the ground with the sole of the shoe. Continue to apply more pressure to slow down faster. Remember, nice and easy.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat. This isn’t mastered in one try. Learn to foot-brake at a comfortable speed (one where braking would normally not be necessary), then work up to stopping from faster speeds.

When learning to brake, boarders often have trouble with the back foot “skipping” off the ground. This happens when too much weight is put on the back foot. Instead, make sure most weight is on the front leg, and lightly drag the back foot to slow down.

### What is the Young Athlete Program?

UPMC Sports Medicine’s Young Athlete Program brings together a network of specialists that provides individualized attention for injury prevention and management.

Our physicians and physical therapists use cutting-edge, science-based techniques to help speed recovery, and quickly and safely prepare the athlete to return to the field of play. Athletic trainers, sports performance coaches, and other experts focus on injury prevention, nutrition, conditioning, and activity-specific training.

Regardless of age or sport, the Young Athlete Program has the expertise, technology, and services to make a difference for your athlete. For more information or to make an appointment, call **412-432-3700** or visit [UPMC.com/SportsMedicine](https://UPMC.com/SportsMedicine).

Our partner, Centers for Rehab Services, offers your young athlete physical therapy services at more than 40 convenient locations. To find an office near you, or to make an appointment, call **412-432-3700**.