

Newsletter

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Benefits to multi-sport athletes

Why diversity in sports can lead to greater success

by Ashley Maness, PT, DPT

Over 60 million children are registered to play youth sports in the United States. In the world of athletics, the focus is often on specialization. From a young age, athletes are encouraged to hone their skills in a single sport, driven by the belief that dedication to one discipline will yield the greatest success. However, an increasing body of research and anecdotal evidence suggests that multi-sport athletes—those who participate in a variety of sports—can enjoy a range of benefits that may enhance their overall athletic performance and personal development.

Here's a closer look at why embracing a multi-sport approach can be advantageous.



"If what you did YESTERDAY seems big, you haven't done anything TODAY."

—Lou Holtz, Notre Dame

Improved physical development

Participating in multiple sports exposes athletes to a diverse array of physical challenges and movements. This variety helps in developing a more well-rounded physical fitness profile. For instance, a soccer player who also swims may improve their cardiovascular endurance and upper-body strength, while a basketball player who engages in gymnastics might enhance their flexibility and agility. This broad range of physical experiences can contribute to better overall athleticism and reduce the risk of injury by promoting balanced muscle development and improving coordination.

Reduced risk of overuse injuries

Specializing in a single sport often leads to repetitive stress on the same muscle groups and joints, increasing the risk of overuse injuries. Multi-sport athletes, by contrast, engage different muscle groups and movement patterns, which can help prevent these types of injuries. For example, a tennis player who also plays baseball might avoid shoulder issues related to repetitive overhead motions because the varied activities reduce the strain on any one area of the body.

Increased cognitive flexibility

Engaging in different sports requires athletes to adapt to various strategies, rules, and game scenarios. This cognitive flexibility—being able to switch between different types of tasks and thinking processes—can enhance an athlete's problem-solving skills and decision-making abilities. Multi-sport athletes often become more adept at reading different game situations and adjusting their strategies on the fly.

Greater enjoyment and motivation

Diverse sports experiences can keep athletes motivated and engaged. The variety of activities helps to prevent burnout and boredom that can arise from focusing on a single sport. Enjoyment of multiple sports can foster a lifelong passion for physical activity, leading to a healthier lifestyle and sustained athletic involvement well beyond youth and competitive years.

Development of transferable life skills

Multi-sport athletes often develop a range of life skills that go beyond physical performance. For example, they learn to manage different types of training schedules, work with various coaches, and adapt to different team dynamics. These experiences can foster resilience, adaptability, and teamwork skills that are valuable in both athletic and non-athletic contexts.

Long-term athletic longevity

Athletes who specialize early may experience peak performance at a younger age but can also face early burnout or physical decline. Multi-sport athletes, by varying their activities, might enjoy a longer athletic career. The diversity in their training can lead to better overall fitness and a more sustainable approach to their physical pursuits.

The benefits of multi-sport participation are clear and multifaceted. By engaging in a range of athletic activities, athletes can develop a more balanced physical profile, reduce their risk of injuries, and enjoy a more fulfilling and varied sports experience. For young athletes and those considering their future in sports, embracing a multi-sport approach can provide a solid foundation for long-term success and well-being. Who knows, you can be the next Patrick Mahomes (Baseball/Football), Elena Delle Donne (Basketball/Volleyball), Bo Jackson (Football/Basketball), or Dara Torres (Swimming/Volleyball).



“Today I will do what others WON'T,
so tomorrow I can accomplish what
others CAN'T.”

—Jerry Rice, San Francisco 49ers

Fuel your performance & optimize your recovery with proper nutrition

by Dennis Bueso, MA, RD

Pregame meal & hydration

Increase performance with a pre-game meal containing 500-1,000 calories three to four hours before the event.

- The meal should be:
 - High in starches (e.g. rice, pasta, potatoes, bread) and other complex carbs (fruits, vegetables, legumes). The carbohydrates and fiber in these foods help to give you immediate and sustained energy throughout the event.
 - Moderate in protein (e.g. chicken, fish, eggs, beef, pork). You want to include protein, but not the majority of the meal being protein. This allows for timely digestion of the protein before the game or event.
 - Low in fats (e.g. fried food, greasy food, heavy sauces or dressing). Fats take longer to digest, so you don't want a high fat meal that could still be digesting by the time you need to perform. If your body is digesting food, it impedes the ability to perform optimally.
 - Low in high sugar and junk foods (e.g. chips, candy, cookies, donuts). These do not support sustained energy during a game and can lead to a crash in energy later on.
- Drink adequate fluids prior to a game. Drink 10-15 mL water per five pounds of body weight four hours before.

Bonus tip: For endurance events that will last more than two hours, carb load by eating a high carb diet (~70% of total calories from carbs) in the two to three days before the event. This helps to maximize energy stores in the body.

“Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.”

— John Wooden

During game/event

- Drink chilled water or sports drinks. Chilled water is absorbed quicker and sports drinks can provide sugar and electrolytes that are lost or used during the game.
- For endurance events lasting more than 2 hours, glucose gels may be useful to replenish glucose used up in the first two hours of an endurance event.

Bonus tip: Electrolyte drink/powder brands: Powerade, Gatorade, Propel, Nooma, Precision Hydration, Nuun, Transparent Labs Hydrate.

Postgame meal

Support optimal recovery after an event by having a small meal 30-60 minutes after the event, and a large meal one to two hours after the event.

- The small meal 30-60 minutes after the event could be:
 - A small meal or snack with carbs, protein, and fat (e.g. apples and peanut butter, tuna crackers, veggies and hummus, cheese and crackers). This helps recovery by providing protein and replenishing glucose stores lost during performance.
- Other easy options can be smoothies or chocolate milk.
- If not very hungry or difficult to eat right after the game, try something simple like fruit, bread, crackers, or even popsicles.

The larger balanced meal one to two hours after the game should include a healthful balance of carbohydrates for energy and protein for optimal recovery. Fats are also useful for supporting hormone health and provide long-term energy.

- Post-event hydration: 16-24 ounces of water per pound lost during the game or event.

Meet Your Sentara Sports Medicine Team

Ashley Maness PT, DPT



Ashley is a Board-Certified Orthopedic Specialist working at Sentara Primary Care and Therapy Center in Staunton, Va. She is originally from South Carolina and graduated from Radford University with her Doctorate in Physical Therapy.

Ashley enjoys working with all populations, athletes returning to peak performance, people motivated to improve their overall physical health, and believes in the notion that movement is medicine. She resides in Crozet, Virginia with her partner and when not working enjoys being outside as much as possible and eating potatoes.

Life goal: hike the Appalachian Trail or complete an ironman. Maybe both.

Dennis FitzPatrick, ATC



Dennis grew up in Chesapeake, Virginia, and attended Virginia Tech where he majored in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise. He obtained his Masters in Athletic Training from Bridgewater College. After graduating, Dennis moved back to Hampton Roads and became the athletic trainer for Hampton High School.

Dennis says a big aspect of athletic training is injury prevention. Being injured can be detrimental both physically and mentally to athletes. Some injury prevention strategies Dennis uses are: reviewing physicals to make sure athletes are cleared to play, advising previously injured athletes to wear braces, which you can get from drug stores or order online, taping wrists, thumbs, and ankles before competition to provide support and stability, developing and implementing prehab strengthening programs for athletes, and putting athletes through dynamic stretches and warmups before practices and games.

Did you know?

Sentara Sports Medicine offers virtual appointments for physical therapy

As the modern healthcare environment continues to evolve, virtual physical therapy services offer opportunities for the active population that are unique, convenient and cutting edge. Sentara Virtual Physical Therapy Services now offers an avenue for patients with non-emergent orthopedic and sports-related injuries to quickly and easily receive advice from a medical professional on a path forward to recovery. The program uses Athletic Trainers, Physical Therapists, and other healthcare professionals to offer many options when choosing convenient and competent care teams.

Our Virtual Physical Therapy Services may be able to provide initial injury intervention to help reduce trauma such as swelling, immobility and provide guidance on pain control to prepare for the next phase of recovery and a return to full

activity. We use video visits, direct to provider messaging, and App-based self-guided home exercise programs to offer creative solutions for patients. Our patients praised the ease of use, convenient appointment times, lack of travel, and quick scheduling associated with Sentara's Virtual Physical Therapy Program.

We look forward to continuing to offer new and creative solutions for Sentara Therapy Patients.

Injured athletes can call **757-388-1457** to schedule or can self-schedule through **MyChart** for Virtual Care-Physical Therapy.

To schedule an appointment to see a sports physical therapist, please contact our Outpatient Therapy Scheduling Office at **855-852-9066** or visit **[sentara.com/therapy](https://www.sentara.com/therapy)**