

The Seattle Soccer Parents' Playbook:

7 Steps to Keep Your Child Off the Sidelines

Dr. Rion Berg





I'm Dr. Rion Berg and I've been practicing podiatry in Seattle for over 40 years. Each year I see many young soccer players who've sustained foot and ankle injuries that could have been prevented. I wrote this book to empower you to learn the steps you need to take to help your child avoid these conditions and stay off the sidelines.

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Is Your Child Playing Through Pain?

You're not alone. Every season, we see many young Seattle soccer players who've sustained injuries—and parents who wish they'd acted sooner.

The good news? Most youth soccer injuries are **100% preventable** with the right knowledge.

This guide will show you how to:

- Spot the signs and symptoms of common foot and ankle conditions and what to do about it.
- Choose the right cleats for your child's feet.
- Other things you can do to prevent your child from getting injured.
- Know when to see your podiatrist.



The #1 Mistake Seattle Soccer Parents Make

Waiting too long to address "minor" pain.

What starts as "just a little heel soreness or ankle pain" can turn into:

- Missed games and tournaments
- Months of physical therapy
- A frustrated kid who loses confidence and interest

Young feet are still developing-growth plates, ligaments, and tendons are more vulnerable to stress and over-use. The constant running, cutting, and sudden stops soccer requires puts added pressure on toes, arches, and ankles. But with proper support and early intervention, common injuries can be prevented.

Part 1: The 5 Most Common Youth Soccer Injuries in Seattle

Sever's Disease (Heel Pain)

- **What it is:** It's a growth plate inflammation in active kids that they will eventually grow out of by age 15.
- **Warning signs:** Pain during/after practice, limping in the morning, reluctance to run
- **Who gets it:** Active kids ages 8-14, especially during growth spurts
- **Treatment:** Reduce or stop activity, calf stretching, ice after practice, and using anti-inflammatory medications if your doctor recommends it.
- **Prevention:** Reducing risk for obesity, choosing proper athletic shoes or cleats, and taking time to rest between play.



Turf Toe

- **What it is:** Big toe joint sprain from hyperextension
- **Warning signs:** Pain, swelling, and bruising at base of big toe, especially when pushing off
- **Where it happens:** While turf toe is more likely on artificial turf fields, it can also occur on grass fields which are more common in Seattle.
- **Treatment:** RICE-rest, ice, compression, and elevation; walking boot; and physical therapy.
- **Prevention:** Stiffer-soled cleats, dynamic warm-ups, addressing gait abnormalities with custom orthotics, and proper rest and recovery.



Ankle Sprains

- The risk: Ankle sprains account for 29% of all soccer related injuries
- Signs: Pain, swelling, bruising, and instability after an injury
- Why it matters: Can lead to [chronic ankle instability](#)
- Treatment: RICE (see above), walking boot, physical therapy, and sometimes surgery
- Fix: Cleats that fit properly and provide good support, dynamic warm-ups, and ankle strengthening. If ankle sprains are chronic, your podiatrist needs to provide custom orthotics designed to prevent them.

Black, Bruised, or Ingrown Toenails

- Causes: Cleats too small, too long, or toenails too long allowing nails to hit top of cleats.

Treatment:

- Draining if blood builds up under nail
- Proper removal of toenails if coming off
- Ingrown toenail surgery if needed.



Simple Prevention

- Trim nails straight across, ensure cleats fit properly and have a wide enough toe box.

Shin Splints & Stress Fractures

- **Red flags:** Pain along shin bone that worsens with activity. Swelling, redness, and bruising.
- **Common in:** Players who train too much too quickly
- **Treatment:** Rest and keep foot immobile for 6 weeks.
- **Prevention:** Increase training gradually, wear supportive cleats, and obtain custom orthotics if child has improper foot mechanics.

Part 2: The Pre-Season Foot Health Checklist

Before the season starts:

- Check shoes fit and integrity: kids' feet grow quickly, and shoes often must be replaced 1-2 times a year. In teens who have stopped growing, look for worn or uneven soles, increased sole flexibility, and stretched uppers. All of these indicate that the cleats need replacing.
- Check toenails – trim if needed straight across but not too short. Inspect for pain and swelling to ensure nails aren't ingrown
- Schedule trip to shop for cleats

Part 3: Choosing the Right Soccer Cleats

Buying the right cleats for your child can make a big difference in comfort and injury prevention.

Proper fit

- Measure your child's feet every time new cleats are purchased.
- Ensure there is a thumb's width of space at the toe.
- Cleats also need to be wide enough to prevent blisters and toenail injuries.
- Heels should fit snugly. Too loose can compromise stability and control.
- Cleats should be comfortable immediately.
- Shop for cleats in the afternoon when feet are slightly swollen from daily activity.

Support

- Bend test: Cleats should bend at ball of foot, NOT in the arch.
- Twist test: Cleats should not easily twist when wrung out like a rag.
- Heel test: The heel of the cleats should be firm, not soft and flexible.

Playing Surface

Choose cleats based on playing surface.

- Firm Ground Cleats: great all-around cleats for different outdoor surfaces.
- Turf Cleats: indoor soccer

Foot Health

If your child tends to develop ingrown toenails, purchase cleats with a wider toe box offered by the following brands: Adida, Puma, or New Balance.

When to Replace Cleats

- Worn-down studs
- Stretched out upper material
- Cleats are too flexible (bending in the arch)-this increases risk for turf toe.
- Child complains of discomfort



Part 4: Preventing Soccer Injuries

While choosing the right soccer cleats will go a long way in preventing injuries such as turf toe and black toenails, there are other important pre-and post-game practices to put in place.

- Address Poor Biomechanics – If your child has flat feet or overpronates, they need to see a podiatrist to get fit for custom orthotics. Youth with these foot types are more at-risk for developing plantar fasciitis.
- Proper Warm-Ups – light jogging and dynamic stretching will help prevent injuries. Some examples of dynamic stretches are leg swings, walking lunges, and high knees.
- After Play
 - ◇ Cool down walk
 - ◇ Static stretches of calf muscles



Part 5: When to Visit Your Podiatrist

It's essential to address any foot pain your child is experiencing during or after soccer play. And of course, never let them play through pain. Here's when to bring them in:

- Persistent pain or swelling after play.
- Severe pain that limits walking or the inability to bear weight.
- Visible swelling or bruising.
- Recurring blisters or toenail problems (ingrown, black, or painful).
- Heel pain that worsens with activity – this could be Sever's disease.
- Ankle rolling or giving out and repeated ankle sprains.

Final Thought: An Ounce of Prevention...

Most youth soccer injuries are predictable and preventable. With the right knowledge and proactive care, your child can enjoy soccer safely for years to come. Early evaluation can prevent a minor problem from turning into a season-ending injury or future foot and ankle problems.

We're here to help Seattle's young athletes thrive.



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