

## **Baseball / Softball Pre-Season Tips**

Now that winter is here in full force, we're sure you've had thoughts of the warmth of spring and being outside again. Well if you're a baseball, softball, or any spring sport athlete your mind is in the right place. Now is the time to start initiating spring training schedules.

Just as a new glove must be conditioned for the beginning of a fresh new season, so must an athlete's body. For a baseball or softball player to optimize his or her athletic fitness a conditioning program must be initiated. The goal of the pre-season program is to have the athlete in top condition to avoid problems. A program is geared to preventing or reducing injuries with special emphasis on avoiding overuse injuries and injuries due to weakness. The pre-season program should start from a general to a sport specific regimen.

In the beginning general athletic fitness should be improved upon. The body should be gradually prepared for more intense training. This includes aerobic and anaerobic activities. Endurance running and sprinting should begin early. Low weight training can also be initiated for an overall body work-out. Include flexibility and stretching routines to loosen the shoulder and minimize "pulled" muscles in the thighs.

The second phase of the off-season conditioning should be sport-specific athletic fitness. An example is sprinting the distances of bases or quick short sprints to work on getting under a ball for an anticipated catch. Throwing should be initiated at least six weeks prior to competitive play. Also continue weight training, the athlete should be getting stronger at this phase.

The third phase is begun closer to the start of the season. A program which refines the athlete's skills and technique should be initiated in this phase. Batting practice, catching and sliding should be started during this time.

A well - designed conditioning program started in the winter aiming towards spring baseball or softball will help to optimize performance on the field and minimize the injury risk. Remember, also start a fitness program with goals and leave yourself adequate time to accomplish these goals. Too many athletes just begin a season cold and wind up with unnecessary injuries. Paying attention to pre-season conditioning can be the key to enjoying a fun, pain-free and injury-free season.