

Youth Pitching Guide - All You Need to Know

NOTE: Some sections have several pages and you will need to scroll through them using the scroll bar at the right. You can also print this book.



Youth Pitching Guide

All You Need to Know

www.youthpitcher.com

From 8-18 & up, we specialize in youth pitching instruction.

Everything you need to know to help your young pitcher be the best they can be!
They most likely didn't ride a bike first without training wheels.
This pitching guide is their training wheels.
And when you and your pitcher are ready to take off the training wheels
we're there with other resources to help you get to the next level.

Thousands of hours of experience and research takes the guess work out, and puts the fun back in.

We have not created a "static" book that won't change, or create this book to sell it to you and disappear. We're here to support you along the way for as long as you need us, through continued video analysis, online support and if possible, personal one-on-one instruction.

This is THE MOST CRITICAL TIME for youth pitchers, especially 8-12 year olds. They shouldn't pitch one more ball until they know how to do it correctly. Every improper throw adds to the muscle memory and makes it more difficult to correct, plus they could hurt their arms in the process.

I've combined my 30 years of personal pitching knowledge, experiences, coaching, instructing, research, and training into an easy to use, easy to communicate, and easy for youngsters to read and understand pitching guide.

Combine this guide along with our video analysis service, resources and support and we can develop solid pitching mechanics for your young (or experienced) pitcher.

You won't find a better value, or a guide that is solely focused on the youth pitcher as this. Most of our photos are packed within a few pages to make it easier for you to reference. We took our time to explain some things in detail in this guide, so don't skip over anything, you might miss something very important.

Visit our web site at: www.youthpitcher.com

Baseball, like most things in life are a lot more enjoyable if you can do them well. This guide isn't preaching that every pitcher must be a great pitcher or they won't have any fun if they don't make an all star or travel team. It's simply giving them the tools to make sure they have the best opportunity to have fun. What's more, the fact that baseball pitching is the most un-natural motion for a human, and the stresses created on the elbow and shoulder, this guide is truly meant to reduce the risk of serious arm injuries. Nobody can promise a pitcher won't develop an arm problem of some sort, or some soreness from time to time, but we can tell you that if you and your pitcher take just a little time, you will significantly reduce the chance of arm problems and improve the pitching along the way, which will make it more fun for everyone.

This is THE most critical time for teaching your young pitcher (especially 8-12 years old), don't waste another day, start teaching as soon as you get our easy to follow guide, and sign up for our Free Newsletter, and look at our unique membership program which is the best value out there today. See page 40 for details.

They shouldn't pitch one more ball at that age until they know how to do it correctly. Every improper throw adds to the muscle memory and makes it more difficult to correct, and those muscles have to be re-trained.

I've spent literally thousands of hours over the last 20 years pulling this information together in an easy to understand, easy to follow guide. You won't have to sift through stuff that is meant for a pro or college pitcher.

I'm a former pitcher, current coach and dad of a youth pitcher. I've been involved with youth pitchers as a coach for over 15 years (5 of which is with my 11 year old son). I've had professional pitching instruction, arm problems, success as a pitcher, have a son who is a good youth pitcher, who also has had arm problems, and recovered only to be better. I've been in and seen most every situation in regards to pitching and pitching instruction.

I've been involved with Little League baseball for over 30 years. Managed and helped coach successful little league all star and travel teams at both the 9-10, and 11-12 year old age divisions, I've witnessed every thing imaginable over this period, which has benefitted me greatly and made me realize how under-served, not only the young pitchers, but the coaches, and parents for these youngsters are. I'm constantly talking with many coaches in the area at all levels, and nearly 90% of the time they readily admit they can't teach pitching, and trust that the pitcher is learning it correctly at home or in some camp. This isn't just little league coaches, this is high school coaches as well. That's truly scary! I've learned first hand the ups and downs of being a good pitcher, along with shoulder problems, and having taught my son who is a successful little league pitcher who developed an elbow problem, only to return better. So my experiences are your benefit.

I'm amazed every day at the ball field, travel tournaments, all stars, regular season games, even on TV for the Little League world series, I hear coaches constantly say things like: "Just throw strikes", "Come on now, focus", And a ton of other useless information.

Believe me, nobody is trying harder to throw strikes than the pitcher, and he's focusing the best he knows how. I heard one coach with 2 separate pitchers in the same game say, "if you walk this kid I'm taking you out", what do you think happened, that's right, both pitchers walked the next kid, and frankly they weren't even close to throwing a strike. Maybe kids need to be motivated to focus that way, but kids need to be told useful quick information, not stating the obvious like "you're not throwing strikes", etc. Help them change their thoughts if they're struggling, slow things down, change the routine, move on the mound, anything but say, "come on, throw strikes". Kids need encouragement and positive vibes at all times.

Although we've put in most everything you'll need to know, we're constantly looking to update this guide with new and improved drills, strength and conditioning, resources, etc., and with our unique membership you'll be notified via email at least twice per month with anything new and updated, along with our newsletter, photos, video clips, email support, and video analysis. We have team packages if you're a coach and you want video analysis of all your pitchers. We also offer group or individual instruction. Please see page 40 for details.

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Goals:

Everything you do in your life should have a goal of some kind. Even though this may be for a youth pitcher, simple goals like throwing more strikes than balls, walking less than 5 batters per game, having a good attitude, etc. are good things to start early.

I'm not trying to put pressure on a young pitcher, but even an easy to reach goal is important, it gives them a reason to work at it, a sense of accomplishment when they reach it, and the desire to set even higher goals. Depending on the age and/or experience level, the goals will be different, but you can make them fun goals so there's no real pressure, and slowly increase the goal or add to it as they improve. Remember, not only is baseball a highly skilled sport in itself, but pitching (and hitting) are the 2 most difficult things to do in any sport, if not any sport, so it may take weeks and months before you see any significant improvement in pitching performance. It takes patience and a willingness to want to improve. Don't expect too much too early, and expect some rough times initially while the pitcher is learning. They will need your constant encouragement and positive vibes.

Sample Goals:

New pitchers just starting out

- Have fun
- Develop and stick to a routine
- Throw at least one strike to each batter (sounds crazy, but for an 8 or 9 year old just learning, you don't want them throwing 12 straight balls and it will happen, but expecting a new pitcher to strike everyone out is not a realistic or a good goal anyway)
- Walk less than 3 batters per inning
- Walk 6 or less batters per 3 innings
- Stay positive, be mentally tough
- Throw more strikes this game than the last game
- Have Fun

Young pitchers with some experience

- Have Fun
- Walk 2 or less batters per inning
- Allow less than 4 runs per 3 innings
- Throw a first strike to at least 70% of the batters (7 out of 10 batters).
- Stay positive, be mentally tough
- Have Fun

Young pitchers with a lot of experience

- Have Fun
- Walk 1 batter or less per inning
- Allow less than 2 runs per 3 innings
- Strike out one batter per inning or more
- Stay positive, be mentally tough
- Throw less than 40 pitches per 3 innings
- Only throw 3 balls to no more than 6 batters per 3 innings.
- Stay positive, be mentally tough
- Have Fun

*It's important that your pitcher develops the attitude of what he is going to do as opposed to what he hopes he doesn't do (i.e. "I'm going to get this kid out", as opposed to, "I hope I don't walk this kid").

Older pitchers with experience

- Walk less than 2 batters per 3 innings
- Throw first strikes to 80% of the batters
- Don't go to 0-3 on more than 3 batters per 3 innings
- Stay positive, be mentally tough

Goal setting is very important, even at an early age. This isn't meant to put pressure on them, again, just something good to start at an early age, and it can be a fun goal starting out that they must have a good attitude and have fun. Sounds easy, but good attitudes need work too. The mental part of pitching is as much if not more important than any other aspect of pitching.

Once you see improvement enough, than you can adjust the goals. Maybe for the new pitcher it's only allowing 15 batters in 3 innings. In little league (9 & 10 year olds) they can only pitch 3 innings per game.

If the pitcher is really struggling, than adjust the goal backwards so he can achieve some type of goal and feel good about any kind of improvement. Constant encouragement towards them is a must. Maybe he walked 10 kids, gave up 8 runs, and hit 3 kids, but if he maintained his composure and self control throughout those innings, that's a huge positive building block, make sure to point that out to them. Just tell them that even the pros have tough games and innings, and to keep a good attitude like that during the game showed how mentally tough they are. You must find something positive about the game.

Having a goal like winning the game is not a good goal for you pitcher, scoring runs isn't totally in your pitchers' control. He could lose a 1-0 game and not give up a hit, and he shouldn't feel he failed.

I know some dads and kids (some years ago) that their goal was to be the hardest thrower in the league. Well, they accomplished that goal, only problem was he (this is true) hit at least 5-6 kids every game, and threw roughly 20% strikes. He rarely made it past the 2nd inning. I haven't seen or heard from this player in 3 years, but I do know he doesn't pitch anymore, he's an infielder only. With proper instruction, mechanics, and practice the velocity will come. Even with the pitchers' best mechanics and physical conditioning, the body will only allow the pitcher a certain velocity. Even in the pro's some of the best pitchers are ones that have consistent, good command of their pitches, and the changeup continues to be the most affective pitch once learned.

Since I don't know the true skill level of your pitcher, it's difficult for me to give you good goals for them, and if you're having a hard time with this part, you can email me at: pitchinggoals@youthpitcher.com and I'll respond to you with some suggestions specific to your pitcher. In your email include:

- Pitchers age
- Experience (pitched for 3 years and they're 12)
- Have they pitched in an all star game ?
- Have they pitched on a travel (tournament) team ?
- Do they throw hard
- Are they wild (pitching) ?
- Is this his first year pitching ?

And any other details you can give me.

It's VERY important to remember you're trying to improve the skill of your pitcher, you can't control the kid playing 2nd base for the first time, or a first time catcher, etc. Your focus has to be on what your pitcher is doing, and that's it.

Arm Care

Become part of the new breed of parent or coach. Take care of those young kids' arms.

It might have been excusable 20 years ago to not know about arm care, but with this information, and abundance of information throughout this guide and the tons of information available over the web and through sports medicine clinics, etc. ignorance is longer excusable.

I'm not going to take 10 pages to talk about arms, muscles, growth plates, flexors, etc. Very simply, these are the things you need to do to care for the pitchers arm.

Pitchers need to (actually everyone should at least do the stretching and warm up):

Before Pitching

Proper Stretching (see page 10-11)

Proper Warmup (see page 12)

After Pitching

Proper cool down/icing

During the game, pitchers should take a towel and wrap it around their shoulder and elbow to keep the muscles and tendons warm.

After the game, when pitchers get home, or preferably right after the game the pitcher should ice down the shoulder and elbow for 15 minutes. Don't underestimate this, and don't feel like you're being over-protective. If your son was bleeding wouldn't you put a bandaid on him? Well, that's all you're doing here, except the bleeding is on the inside. After pitching (actually it starts happening throughout the game), the muscles have started micro-bleeding, and the sooner you can ice it down, the faster the healing begins. The ice will reduce the swelling taking place in the arm and rejuvenate the muscles a lot faster.

For icing, you can use a frozen bag of peas because it conforms to the elbow and shoulder well. Place a thin towel or t-shirt between the ice and skin. You can also purchase a shoulder and/or elbow wrap that comes with jell packs you can freeze and just put in the slots in the wrap. These are fairly inexpensive and can be purchased at most sporting goods stores.

Sore Arms - Symptom - What to do

Take sore arms very seriously ! Especially during a game. If the pitcher keeps flexing his arm at the elbow, ask him to tell you the truth. If he says it hurts, you take him out right then. There's a difference between not being loose and the muscles hurting.

3 main areas of concern are:

The back side of the elbow (outer) part of the elbow

The inner part of the elbow (bicep area)

The shoulder (rotator cuff)

Very simply, if your player complains of pain in any of these areas, you need to take them out. Asking your pitcher to pitch with pain can cause damage that could affect him the rest of his life. If it's your son, make sure he has a way of telling you during the game if his arm is in pain. I know you don't want to step on a coaches toes, but you have every right as a parent to know how your son is feeling, and if your son's arm hurts and the coach won't take him out because it's a close game, then you take him out. I know these coaches are only volunteers and many of them are doing their absolute best, and most are not trying to hurt a pitchers arm, they just don't understand all that is involved. I'm in the process of trying to educate every little league coach and parent of a pitcher about this so everyone can be on the same page.

There's a ton of information out there, and unless you've been involved with pitching for a long time, it will simply take you a long time to sift through all of the information (if you can understand most of the medical jargon) or how it really applies to your pitcher. And since many kids might not develop an arm problem, most people think that it's the "other kid" that this stuff happens to and don't give it a second thought. Since I've had the luxury of being a pitcher, and going through arm problems myself, along with being involved with little league coaching, parents, pitchers and pitchers with various arm problems, I've done all the research for you and made it very simple for you to understand. If you're explaining this to another person and they don't have this guide, please have them go to my website and click on the "Free Newsletter" link and they'll get my newsletters for Free, including the one on sore arms.

The pitching elbow and shoulder are two of the most complicated joints in the body. The elbow takes on the most stress of any part when pitching. If you've ever taken a bucket and put a little water in it and swung it around in circles upside down and thought it was cool how the water stayed in and was forced to the bottom of the bucket. Well, the elbow joint and shoulder joint is the water in the bucket, and when a pitcher throws, those joints are trying their hardest to get out of the bucket, but these tiny little muscles, tendons, bones, and growth plates are somehow holding them in there. The forearm has two bones, and the bicep has one bone, the only thing keeping the forearm from separating from the bicep is some tendons and muscles. A growth plate is pieces of bone that actually grows, but it's supposed to move and grow at the proper time, not when it's being put under amazing stress and force. When it's overused the growth plate can actually separate from other parts of the bone creating what can be arm problems for life, and in some instances, a deformed arm that might make other tasks difficult.

This is NOT meant to scare anyone away from pitching, pitching can be one of the most rewarding things in baseball. It's an unbelievable feeling grabbing the new ball off the mound and rubbing it down before the first pitch. The pitcher is the only one that will touch the ball every time. Thousands and thousands of kids pitch without problems, and the many that do develop some problems, with the proper knowledge (like we're giving you here) on proper arm care and what to do with a sore arm and how to condition the body, the pitcher in most cases recovers pretty quickly and can resume pitching. Once they learn the proper mechanics (like we teach you here), they reduce the risk of injury and will enjoy the game longer. What's important here to remember is that these little league pitchers aren't just pitchers, they play other positions too, and they should want to stay healthy so they can play those other positions and not miss games because they didn't practice the correct mechanics and train their body, arm and mind properly to pitch. There's no guarantees there won't be a sore arm at some point, but just having knowledge is worthless, putting knowledge to work is powerful

Sore Arms - Symptoms - What to do

Please note, I'm not a doctor. But I've spent a lot of time talking with them and going through most of this, along with years of experience dealing with it and researching it, so this is general information to help you. If you have any questions or your son or pitcher develops an arm or back problem while pitching, please see your doctor. Whatever you do though, unless it's major surgery, don't let the arm sit idol for 4 weeks to "rest". Any good sports doctor or orthopedic surgeon will tell you the same thing. Start a gradual rehab program right away. It only take 10-15 minutes a day and your pitcher will be back in no time.

The Elbow:

Symptoms: Outside (bony part) of the elbow hurts or pops. It can be a gradual thing (watch for your pitcher constantly flexing his elbow or snapping it out when he doesn't have the ball. It can also be an instant thing (although the muscle could have been breaking down all along with no symptoms). The pitcher on one pitch might just grab his elbow as the ball just floats barily to home plate. Or on the inside of the elbow where it bends.



Causes: Overuse, and even underuse. Most likely a small tear, stress or strain in the tendon or muscle. This is commonly referred to now as "Little Leaguers Elbow". I mention "underuse" here because it's not only my feeling, but the feeling of many that too many kids don't throw enough these days. I don't mean pitching everyday, but playing simple catch at least 3 times per week. Kids have a lot of other things to do than we did growing up, and there's more soer arms now than when I was a kid because we threw more often.

What to do: In any case, get a bag of ice (break up the ice by placing a towel over it and hitting it with a spoon. Put a t-shirt between the ice and skin and use a towel to hold the ice on the elbow, or use an ace bandage to wrap the ice bag to the elbow and leave it there for 15-20 minutes. Do that 2-3 times per day. If he's in obvious pain and can't flex his arm without a severe amount of pain, take him to the doctor. They will most likely tell you it's a small tear or strain, and they'll recommend to ice it 3 times per day for 10-15 minutes. It's possible if it's bad enough they might recommend a specialist look at it. No matter what, if a doctor recommends surgery, get a second opinion. In most cases, after 2 days you'll want to start rehabing it slowly. Letting it sit idol for 4 weeks is the worse thing you can do. What do they do with people after surgery, they get them in rehab that day.

Rehab: For most elbow injuries this is what you should start with. If any of these cause pain, then stop and try later that day, but at a slower pace or not as aggressive in the rehab. They need to start slow and build up, and do it without pain. They may be a little sore, but you need to be able to have them tell you if it hurts (painful) or if it's sore. If through the light rehab they complain of "pain" take them to the doctor, preferably to a sports medical clinic. For rehab we're not just building back up the elbow, but we need to strengthen all of the muscles that come into play (tricep, bicep, elbow, wrist).

For the rehab part described here, after 5-6 days, take one day off, then start again, and each new week add one more rep to each set (i.e if it's 2 reps of 10, make it 2 reps of 11. We're adding about 10% each week for one month).

Rehab - cont'd

Weeks 1 - 4 (4-5 times per week) Starting with week 2 they'll begin stretching routine again (see pages 9-10)

- Use a racquet-ball to squeeze. Hold for a 3 count and release and do it again 10 times.
- Use a hammer to hold. Support the arm and turn wrist to inside, hold and then back. Do 10 times
- Rubber bands on the outside of the fingers to stretch open and hold. Do 10 stretches and hold for 3-count, then relax fingers.
- Small 1-2 lb weight (hammer), do wrist curls with arm laying flat on a table curl wrist up slow and down slow. Do 10 times.
- Same 1-2 lb. weight, hold arm up by head and slowly raise arm to extend and then back up. Do 10 times.
- Same weight and arm on table or knee, do bicep curl, do 10 times.
- Do each of the above one again.
- Ice after and ice one more time during the day or night. (10 minutes each)

Week 2:

Still doing the above rehab, add the normal stretching routine (pages 9-10) after the rehab is done, but only do half of the normal stretching (i.e. if it's 2 sets, do 1, or if it's 10 reps, do 5).

Starting with the 3rd week (4-5 days), and still doing the rehab and the stretching, now add some light throwing (tosses). Don't rehab and stretch in the morning and then throw at night. You must at least do the proper stretching and warmup before throwing.

Week 3

- Proper Stretching (Half of normal routine)
- 15 throws at 20-25 feet apart (lightly) Throw at 50% normal speed
- 10 throws at about 30-35-30 feet (lightly) Throw at 50% normal speed

Week 4

- Proper Stretching (Full routine)
- 15 throws at 15-20 feet apart (lightly) Throw at 50% normal speed
- 15 throws at about 25-30 feet (lightly) Throw at 50% normal speed

Week 5

- Proper Stretching (Full routine)
- 15 throws at 15-20 feet apart (lightly) First 12 throws at 60%, last 3 throws at about 75%
- 20 throws at about 25-30 feet (lightly) First 15 throws at 60%, next 3 throws at 70%, last 2 throws at 80%

Week 6

- Proper Stretching (Full routine)
- 15 throws at 15-20 feet apart (50% speed) First 12 throws at 60%, last 3 throws at about 75%
- 10 throws at 30-25 feet apart (70%) First 7 throws at 60%, last 3 throws at about 80%
- 20 throws at normal distance (46 feet) First 10 throws at 60%, next 5 throws at 80%, last 5 throws at 90%.

If after this 6 week period there's still pain, take them to a locally recognized sports medical clinic recommended by your doctor.

If it's in-season, do the normal weekly pitching maintenance. For his first 2 games back, and with 2 full days off between games, he should only pitch one inning (no more than 30 pitches, at 30 pitches or the end of that batter, you take him out). 3rd and 4th games could go to 2 innings and no more than 50 pitches. For the rest of that season he should pitch no more than 60 pitches per game. Off season is using the strength and conditioning program.

If it's off-season after the rehab, then go right into the strength and conditioning program.

Sore Arms - Symptoms - What to do

Please note, I'm not a doctor. But I've spent a lot of time talking with them and going through most of this, along with years of experience dealing with it and researching it, so this is general information to help you. If you have any questions or your son develops an arm or back problem while pitching, please see your doctor. Whatever you do though, unless it's major surgery, don't let the arm sit idle for 4 weeks to "rest". Any good sports doctor or orthopedic surgeon will tell you the same thing. Start a gradual rehab program right away. It only takes 15 minutes a day and your pitcher will be back sooner.

The Shoulder:

Symptom: Popping, grinding, painful to throw, sore, or reduced range of motion.

Causes: Overuse or underuse. Throwing too hard in cold weather. Not properly warmed up. There's many reasons a shoulder injury could occur. I mention "underuse" here because it's not only my feeling, but the feeling of many that too many kids don't throw enough these days. I don't mean pitching everyday, but playing simple catch at least 3-4 times per week.

What to do: Best advice is to rest and ice the shoulder and see a doctor. There's a variety or and varying degrees of shoulder injuries and it's in your pitchers best interest to see a doctor, preferably a sports medical doctor.

Rehab: Doctor's advice.

NOTE: I had a major shoulder problem with my rotator cuff and went through rehab. A good coach should not make a recommendation on rehab in this area or say to rest it for 2 weeks. Total rest is the worse thing, but without knowing specifically what kind of shoulder problems your pitcher is having, trying to make some rehab suggestions here is not in the best interest of your pitcher. Telling you to have the pitcher see a sport medical doctor is the best advice here.

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Proper Stretching

Before I tell you how your pitcher needs to stretch, the following information is important first so you know where I'm coming from on this subject.

Stretching (along with proper warmup) has to be one of the most overlooked, and most important items in youth pitching today, stretching. If the only thing you take out a few things out of this guide, please make this one of them. I see more sore arms from a lack of stretching, proper warmup and poor mechanics than I do anything else. You notice that I said "proper", not just stretching and warming up. I can't stress enough how important this is. I'm speaking from personal experience here. Because of a lack of stretching and proper warmups, on one cool spring practice day as a 12 year old I damaged my rotator cuff to the degree that I literally, and I mean absolutely could not throw a ball 20 feet for the entire season, and it took 6 months of rehab just to be able to throw, not without pain, but I had to change how I threw so I could continue to pitch in high school.

Even my coaches, who everyone at that time had a lot of respect for and were very knowledgeable baseball coaches, but even they didn't know what damage was done to my shoulder, and had no routine for stretching and warmups. Even though they had us "warm up" it really wasn't what a pitcher needed. I'm not blaming them, but actually thanking them, because that incident has helped make my pitching instruction program possible. I've been able to take the knowledge I gained from rehab and I gained a burning desire to make sure I gave every kid I came in contact with the information so they would reduce the chance of this happening to them. My pain is your gain.

Any coach who says they can eliminate a sore arm or arm problems from happening is lying. There's no way to know what's going on inside that body. All you can do is prepare your body and mind as best as possible so you can significantly reduce the chance of problems. Along with that is having the information we give you in this guide on what to do with the various types of arm situations that might arise. Not just preparing your body to reduce the chance of injury, but knowing what to do in that event is just as important. Proper information about recovery, rehab, etc., will help to a speedy recovery so pitching can resume as soon as possible.

Proper Stretching

Note, the things on this page are not to be done when they feel like it. They need to get into a routine of doing this anytime they play catch, especially before they're going to pitch.

This should only take about 10-15 minutes before your pitcher throws. I've had some pitchers tell me their arm has n't been hurting and do they need to stretch, etc. I simply tell them, "see, that's why your arm feels so good". You wouldn't have tea unless it was warmed up. Some things are just necessary.

The stretching should take place about 30 minutes before the game so your pitcher has time to do this, and then warm up with pitching and have time for normal pre-game activity. If the pitcher is to take hitting before the game, have them do it before they start stretching. Another key point most coaches don't do, if you have 4 pitchers on the team, have them all go through the stretching and warmup together. Pitchers need to get "bullpen work" between games, they might as well get some light pitching in between games now. This is a great time to do that. Many kids may not have the chance to get practice or throws in between games, don't miss a great chance, and it's what they should do anyway.

Use only a light (2-3 lb weight, or a softball) for the stretching exercises. Do all of the stretching in controlled, deliberate motions.



Rotator Cuff

Hold weight in pitching hand, bend over and let arm hang down. Make 7 medium size circular motions with the hand clockwise, then 7 counter-clockwise circles. Do 2 reps.



Elbow

Stand up straight with arm out in front, hold weight in pitching hand. Use other hand to support bicep and rotate only the wrist to the inside, hold for a one count and twist back to up/down position. Do 2 reps of 7. Don't rotate the entire bicep, as we want to work just the elbow tendon and muscle and loosen the wrist.



Rotator Cuff

Stand up straight with arm out to side & hold weight in pitching hand. Keep arm straight out and make small circles with hand clockwise, then do it counter-clockwise. Do 2 reps of 7



Shoulder & Rotator Cuff

Stand straight and gently use other hand to hold elbow of pitching arm over the head for a 7 count, relax the arm, and hold hands together on the head for a 3 count and do it again. Do 2 reps of 7-counts.



Shoulder & Rotator Cuff

Stand straight and gently use other hand to hold elbow of pitching arm across the body for a 7 count, relax the arms, for a 3 count and do it again. Do 2 reps of 7-counts.



Wrist and elbow

Stand up straight with pitching arm out in front. Use other hand to pull fingers back gently and hold for a 7 count. Let pitching fingers relax for a one count and the gently pull back again and hold for a 2 count. Do 2 reps of 7-counts of this. Very important to hold for the count and not bounce the fingers quickly back and forth.



Elbow Stretch

Have a coach hold your elbow from behind with one hand, and keeping your bicep level with your shoulders, gently pull the hand back and hold for a 5 count. Do 3 reps of 5.



Elbow and Back of Shoulder

Using surgical tubing, attach to a fence at elbow height, stand sideways to the fence so the tubing is a little stretched. Just using the elbow bend the arm into the stomach and hold for a 2 count, slowly let it back out and do it again. Do 1 rep of 10.



Rotator Cuff

Stand up straight with arm out to side & hold tubing in pitching hand. Get arm into "L" position and then pull through like pitching to the follow through, but keeping upper body upright, release back slowly, then do it again. Do 1 rep of 10.



Elbow & Shoulder

Stand up straight with arm out to side & hold tubing in pitching hand. Have hand across body to start, then using just the shoulder and arm pull across body, then release slowly back. Do 1 rep of 10.



Back

Stand up straight, feet apart, grab one wrist and pull to that side (turn), hold for 3 count, and go back and do it again. Then grab other hand and pull in the other direction.



Warmups

After you've taken 7-10 minutes to stretch the arm, wrist, back, and legs, it's time to warm up properly. I'm using the word "properly" because simply just throwing the ball isn't getting it ready to pitch. Again, only 7-10 minutes of proper warmup will set the arm, body, and mind up to be successful, and most importantly reduce the risk of arm injury. Yes, even an 8, 9, or 10 year old needs to get ready physically and mentally. This is the best time to have them start a routine before, during and after the game. It should become second nature to them, just like chewing bubble gum, they'll just know it's a part of the game.

Let's make it very clear that if you're not the coach, you need to very nicely explain to the coach that your son WILL have a proper pre-game warmup routine. I've been a manager for 6 years now, and I know it's tough for parents to always say what's on their mind, maybe they think you'll make their kid sit out extra innings if they offend you. I encourage parents to tell me instantly if they have any questions, thoughts, input, etc. If your coach says they don't have enough time before the game to stretch and warmup, you tell him/her that your son's arm doesn't have time to pitch then. Seriously, if a coach thinks you're being to over-protective, give them my phone number. Or better yet, you call or email me with their phone number and your leagues president's phone number, I'd be happy to explain why those kids WILL stretch and warmup properly. I do not want to happen to your son's arm what happened to me when I was 12. To this day I can barely move my arm after throwing batting practice or playing long toss.

I won't tell you there's only one way to stretch or warm up, but doing at least a few of these specific things will stretch and warmup the proper areas.

Proper Warmup

- Have the pitcher take a medium paced jog from the dugout to the outfield fence and back. (It's important to get the blood flowing to the extremities. Blood does not flow as good to the small tendons and muscles around the shoulder and elbow, and a short quick jog gets the blood moving to those areas.)
- Take a ball and do 10 windmills in each direction
- Twist the back (arms crossed), and rotate at the hips slowly back and forth
- Start at a little more than half the normal pitching distance and throw 10 medium to slow speed balls
- Move back about 5 steps and throw 3 medium speed balls
- Move back 5 steps and throw 3 medium speed balls
- Move to about where the mound is and throw (don't pitch) 10 medium speed balls
- From your normal pitching stance easily, slowly and smoothly pitch 5 balls about medium speed
- Now, begin to go into your normal speed motion and pitch. Don't just wind up and pitch, put your game face on and focus on not just the mitt, but a dime size area in the mitt and focus on a smooth delivery and pitch at about 85% normal speed for about 3-5 pitches.
- Throw 3-4 pitches at 100%
- Throw 2 at about 80%
- Throw 3 changeups (if you're working on that) in a row
- Throw 2 at 100%

Now, wrap a towel around your shoulder and elbow to keep them warm. If you or your coach is too worried about what people think about doing this, than you're not really concerned about the pitchers' well being. Not only does the towel or coat keep the arm muscles and tendons warm and loose, it makes it easier for starting the next inning to pitch, and reduces the chance for a sudden arm injury. Every person is different and cool down at different rates, etc. You just have to do certain things to give the pitcher the best chance to succeed, and the least chance for injury.

Your pitcher should have a towel or coat to put on between innings. If it's hot, than just wrap the towel around the arm and elbow between innings.

Video Taping

We video tape our pitchers every month just to watch the progress and fine tune. It only takes minutes and it's the only good way to really see what's going on. Kids also respond better to this than just being told. If we can show them with a picture of them doing it, they grasp it faster and more positively. Remember, you're dealing with kids (for the most part), and this isn't the only thing on their minds, nor should it be, but there's instruction, and "proper instruction". Make it fun for them. If you have some plastic milk jugs sitting around, place them as a target for the pitcher to hit, kids like drills if you can make it fun. I've set them on a batting tee on home plate and let them pitch to knock them off while you film them. You could even use plastic pop bottles, something a little smaller than the strike zone.

This is a must. Too many dads and coaches feel like it's overboard to video tape pitchers. If your pitcher was a talented musician, artist, or math wiz, wouldn't you enroll them in an accelerated type class or camp? This is no different. Your pitcher will simply enjoy the game more if they know what they're doing, and more importantly you're trying to avoid arm injuries and this all is a part of that. Parents will enjoy the game more too if their pitcher has at least some success at it.

I highly suggest that you video tape the pitcher as soon as possible and send the video to me to analyze. I'll send "still" photos back with marked up copies and tips, drills, suggestions, etc. back to you with info directly related to your pitcher. Plus you'll have future support from me at our web site. We're not here to just take your money once and hope you disappear. We want you back so you become more knowledgeable and your pitchers succeed, have fun, and avoid injuries.

Most places charge \$100 or more to analyze videos, we do more than just that. We give you constant support, update all of our materials and provide them to you on the web. We'll also suggest a great program for future use so you can really take off once you've learned the basics.

Tape from 3 angles like these photos, the closer to the pitcher the better, as long as I can see the whole body and motion. I don't need to see where the ball is going. In the video viewfinder, have your pitcher fill up as much of the finder as possible, while being able to see the whole body throughout the motion. Front, Behind, and from their pitching arm side.



Send VHS, 8mm, CD to me.

Our web site is: www.youthpitcher.com My email is: videoform@youthpitcher.com

Have your pitcher stretch and arm up first, then have him throw 5-7 pitches from each of the 3 angles. Review your video to make sure it came out. Fill out the form in back of this guide on page 43, and mail it to me at:

Youth Pitcher
4200 Londonderry Ave.
Kalamazoo, MI 49006

Once you mail it to me, please email me at videoform@youthpitcher.com to notify me that you've sent the video. I'll reply once I get it so you know it arrived. From there, depending on how you've elected to get the information back (i.e. postal mail or email). In either case you'll get "still" images showing areas needing work, and areas that look good, along with suggestions, tips, drills, etc. Again, once you sign up as a member I'm there 24 hours a day to respond to your questions, etc. Visit the web site and click on members area.

Pitches & Grips



4-seam fastball - top
Thrown without squeezing the ball too tight & not touching the palm or too far back in the hand



4-seam fastball - front
Fingers (first knuckle) on the seams.



4-seam fastball - side
Don't let ball touch the palm or squeeze too tight.



2-seam fastball - top
You can rotate the ball so fingers don't touch the seams.



2-seam fastball - front



Knuckle Changeup - side



Knuckle Changeup - front



4-finger changeup - top
Ball should be back in the hand touching the top of the palm



Circle changeup - side
This is a hard pitch for most kids to throw.

Bad Grip. Unless this is a changeup, the ball is too far back in the hand.



Pitches & Grips

The grips on the previous page are all any 8-13 year old pitcher needs. The pitchers will develop their fastball, but the next most important pitch is a good changeup. Of the grips shown for a changeup, depending on the size and length of your pitchers' hands and fingers will dictate what kind they will use. They will also find one that simply works better for them. The changeup will take some patience and work. You noticed I don't show how to throw a curve. Read the the following pages after you've read this for why they should NOT throw a curve until they're 14 years old.

One of the most important things about pitching any pitch, is that every bit of the motion looks exactly like the fastball. The tempo of the delivery, mechanics, arm angle, arm speed and follow-through. Most young pitchers do one of several things, from slowing down their motion, to slowing their arm down and not following through, which tips off the batter and allows them to "stay back" and hit the ball. The whole object is to disguise the pitch by making every pitch look the same. Even little things like having the ball in the mitt and having to adjust and move the hands around while they get the proper grip, can also tip off the batter. We spend time working on placing the ball in the mitt a certain way (see next page) so that any grip they want can be done so it looks the same on any pitch to the batter. We usually have the ball in the palm of the mitt with the seams going from left to right so we don't tip off the batter with hand movements inside the mitt.

Fastballs: 4-seam and 2-seam grips give a good mix. The 4-seam is called that because 4 seams will rotate horizontally. 2-seam fastball will rotate 2 seams, not because they're holding 2 of the seams. The 4-seam fastball is the pitch that will have the least movement of any of the pitches, meaning the most level flight. Especially if the pitcher comes over the top more with their arm, this will have the seams spinning backwards and not sideways. Without all of the scientology of why a ball moves a certain way, you can use your imagination and do what I call the "slo-mo" drill, by holding the ball a certain way in your hand and with different arm angles slowly bring the arm forward and with the other hand grab the ball and roll it out the way it would roll off the fingers and you'll get a sense of the ball and seem spin, then try different grips with the ball and slight variations and do slo-mo drill.. Try adjusting the 2-seam fastball in the fingers with various locations of the 2 fingers on the ball and slightly different arm "slots" (arm position at release, and you'll get different movements. Also use slightly different pressure on the ball from the index finger to get a little different action on the ball.

Experiment with some slight variations of arm slot (position of arm coming through before release), and with variations of how the ball is held, especially with different versions of the 2-seam. Depending on many factors that affect how a ball moves through the air you'll find what specific ways for your pitcher to hold the ball to get different types of movements.

Changeups: For the changeup, I can't stress this enough, don't let your pitcher slow his arm speed down so he can throw slower, a decent batter won't have to commit their movements until they're ready to swing and it will be easy to hit. A good changeup gets the batter out on his front foot or committed to swing early while the ball sails below his knees. Again, the same tempo, delivery, mechanics, arm angle, arm speed, and follow-thru. You're trying to take between 6-10 MPH off the fastball and have it starting out coming in just below the belt so it finishes between the knee and ankle. If the proper amount of speed is taken off, the hitter won't know it's going to end up at his ankles until they committed to swing and it's too late. Many times little leaguers struggle to hit a changeup that hangs right over the middle of the plate, but get in the habit and work the low corners with the changeup. It's not like an inside-high fastball kids go for, a high changeup is a sitting duck.

The size and shape of the pitchers hand and fingers will allow or disallow certain types of changeups, so you'll need patience and practice with the pitcher for the changeup. The changeup we've had the best success with is the Knuckle-changeup (using one knuckle as shown). Reason is because no matter how hard they try to throw it, because of the one knuckle dragging on the ball it automatically takes about 8 MPH off the pitch, and it's the most accurate and consistent changeup we've used (with lots of practice). On page 32 we talk about a "long-toss" drill for arm strengthening and conditioning, throwing the changeup during the long-toss drill is a great way to improve the changeup. Since they're throwing from a farther distance and with full arm speed in that drill they'll learn how to accurately throw it and with the correct tempo, delivery, mechanics, arm angle, arm speed, and follow-through.

Pitches & Grips

Changeups: The 4-finger and circle change are thrown with the same concept of having a lot of skin contact on the ball and proper mechanics to throw it. We've found that these 2 pitches aren't quite as effective as the knuckle changeup. Of these 2 the best one to work with is the 4 finger changeup. Don't throw it like a "palm ball". Most kids put it so far back in the palm that they either throw it 3 feet over the catcher or bury it in the ground half way to the plate. Place the ball so it's touching all 3 knuckles of the four fingers, with the thumb on the bottom of the ball and the ball is touching the top half of the palm, this way the ball still rolls off the fingers for control instead of being launched from the palm.

Knuckle-ball: I would not have a pitcher learn a knuckle ball. Although it's a pitch that's easy on the arm, there's a few different mechanics involved and having a young pitcher bounce between 2 different concepts will only mess them up. I've seen many kids say they have a knuckle-ball, but their fingers aren't thick (wide) enough or strong enough to put enough pressure with their nails into the ball to get enough movement or control. What usually happens is it turns into a batting practice pitch.

Ball-Mitt placement: As we mentioned on the previous page about placing the ball in the mitt a certain way just before they get on the mound will help disguise any hand movements on the ball that might tip off the batter as to what kind of a pitch it is. I see some kids go through a different routine at the mound, and they'll put the ball in the mitt any old way so they have to fool around with the ball once they're on the mound. Again, just before they get on the mound they should put the ball in the mitt similar to picture 1 below so if it's a 4-seam all they have to do is put their hand on the ball like picture 2. If it's a changeup, all they have to do is put their hand on the ball and rotate it with their thumb and fingers to get the 2-seam pitch like picture 3. If it's the changeup (whether it's the knuckle-change or 4-finger or circle), all they have to do is put their hand on the ball. The idea is not to get on the mound, decide it's a changeup or 4-seam and let the batter see your pitcher moving their arm and wrist around changing the grip. I have our pitchers practice this in front of a mirror so they can see how it looks to the batter when they change grips. It's a subtle thing, but another important piece to the pitching puzzle.

#1



#2



#3



#4



Blank Page

No Curveballs

That's right, no curveballs.

These next 3 pages will explain why a youngster should not throw a curve. The recommendation here is, don't throw the curve until they're 14 years old. Why?, well when they turn 13 they now jump up to a 60'6" foot distance, and most kids simply don't have the proper arm strength to even pitch affectively from that distance for their first year. They will have a hard enough time "locating" pitches and throwing the changeup at that distance, why throw something else into the mix. Make the 13 year old year as a year to get comfortable at that distance and develop arm strength during that year and work on the curve after they complete their 13 year old year.

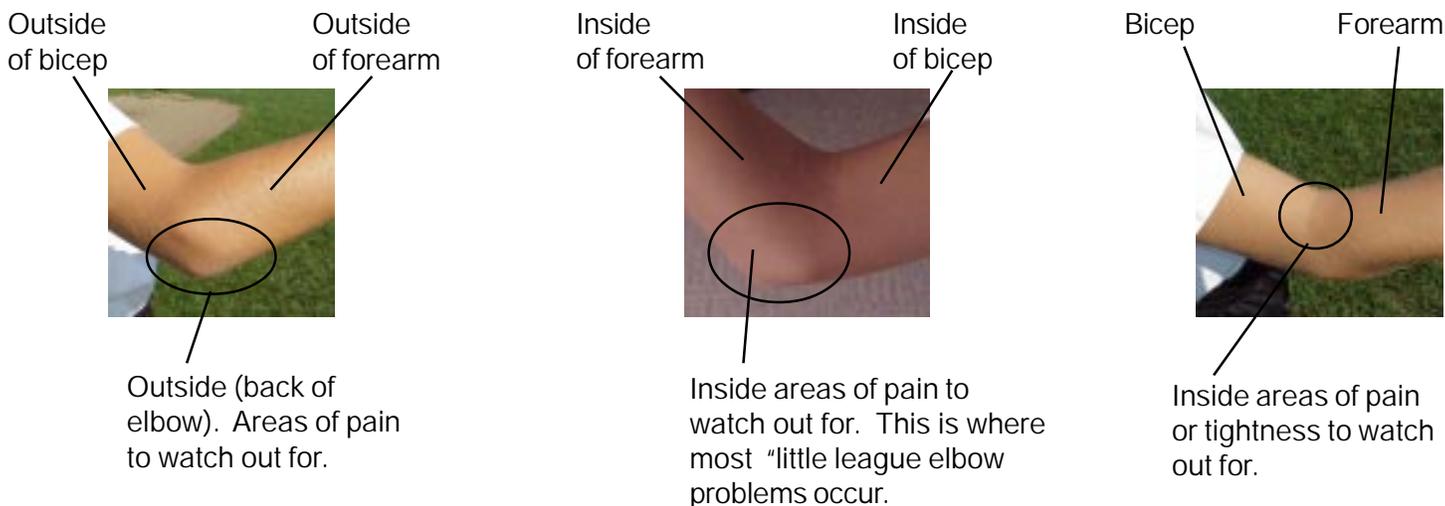
Why shouldn't they throw a curve then at the shorter distance then you ask? Can you say "terminal arm problems?" Sure, they might have some short term success throwing a curve on the smaller field, but while their messing around with that curve they're forgetting how to pitch and "locate" pitches, and develop what even the best pro pitchers use well, and that's a good changeup.

Not only does the pitcher run the risk of serious arm problems, but most young pitchers that do throw curves can't throw it consistently over the plate, and most hitters now are learning to not even swing at them because most of the time it's 2 feet outside in the dirt. Having coached all stars, help coach a very good travel team, along with studying all the pitchers we play against at every level, and also watching regional games as well as going to Williamsport, taping those games and reviewing them, it's very obvious which pitch the kids can't hit, and it's the changeup. It's also better for the arm and easier for the catcher to handle with kids on base. You don't want to let kids run the bases on wild pitches, and most kids throwing curve balls will find kids getting free bases while the catcher tries to defend the curveball. There's a whole host of reasons why the young pitcher not only doesn't need to throw the curve, but shouldn't.

Don't get caught up in the "here for today" syndrome many coaches and dads get into. "If junior can throw that curve then we can win our league, or go farther in all stars". Not only will junior find it a hard pitch to throw properly, but junior will very likely develop some arm problems because of using it down the road. Kids need to master "locating" the fast ball and changeup. That's all they need. Since having arm problems myself I've become a student of arm problems, and interviewing sports surgeons along with orthopedic surgeons, I've confirmed what I thought I already knew, and that's the growth plates in the pitchers elbow can be damaged and pieces of bone can chip away and create a life-long adventure in arm problems. Because of the torque exerted on the elbow to throw the curve, the growth plates, tendons and muscles around the elbow are put at instant risk of injury. The growth plates in a person aren't developed enough until at least 14 years old, and that's depending on the individual.

The elbow is the joint where the upper arm bone (humerus) meets the two bones of the lower arm (ulna and radius). The elbow is a combination hinge and pivot joint. The hinge part of the joint lets the arm bend like the hinge of a door; the pivot part lets the lower arm twist and rotate. The rounded ends of the upper arm bone give the elbow its two "knobs" or bumps (epicondyle). Several muscles, nerves and tendons (connective tissues between muscles and bones) cross at the elbow.

No Curveballs



Little Leaguer's Elbow can be serious if it becomes aggravated. Repeated pulling can tear the ligament and tendon away from the bone. Tearing may pull tiny bone fragments with it in the same way a plant takes dirt with it when it's uprooted. This can affect normal bone growth and even lead to a deformity. The young player feels pain at the knobby bump on the inside of the elbow.

Osteochondrosis happens less, but can cause pain on the outside of the elbow.

Sometimes small fragments of bone are pulled away as well. The elbow also becomes compressed, causing bones to rub together. Young athletes are prone to this type of injury because their bones are immature. A child should stop throwing at the first sign of elbow pain. Young pitchers should not throw a curve ball because the extra twisting motion used to make a pitch "curve" is very hard on the immature elbow.

Shoulder:

The shoulder joint is very susceptible to injury. The joint is held together by surrounding muscles. Almost a quarter of all baseball related injuries come from the shoulder joint or "rotator cuff" and another 10% of injuries come at the elbow joint. These are mostly caused by overuse and not enough rest for the muscles and joints.

Take any complaints of shoulder pain seriously. The shoulder (rotator cuff) injury I got when I was 12 has affected my shoulder my entire life since that day. Proper stretching, warmups, and clothing are very important. Don't let the pitchers (or any player) throw with short sleeves when it's under 60 degrees. For more information about arm injuries, rehab, etc., see page ?? for my recommended resources.

Philosophy & Strategy

For kids between 8-9 years old. They should just focus on throwing the fastball with different grips. When they're 10 & 11 they should begin using the changeup. If they're a new pitcher at 10 or 11 they should just use the various fastball grips and work on the changeup after they've shown the ability to throw strikes and locate the ball.

You've heard the saying in real estate, "location, location, location", well, I think they got that term from baseball. "Locating" pitches in many respects is more important than the pitch itself, whether it's a fastball or changeup won't matter much if it's in the wrong location. How many times do you hear a pro pitcher say "I hung that one out there"? Well, they meant they didn't want that changeup right over the middle of the plate belt high. At an early age I know they need to simply be able to throw it over the middle, and that's great, but while you're working with them to hit the catcher's mitt over the middle of the plate, why not work with them hitting the catcher's mitt on the outside corner and low, or inside and high. It's all psychological. I think it's harder to get a youngster to "locate" pitches after they've been trained for 2 years to do nothing but throw the ball right over the middle because that's where the catcher had his mitt. For some reason they have a sense that if it hits the outside or inside part of the plate that it counts as a half of a strike.

One of the most important things about pitching any pitch, is that every bit of the motion looks exactly like the fastball. The tempo of the delivery, the mechanics, arm angle, arm speed and follow-thru. Most young pitchers do one of several things, from slowing down their motion, to slowing their arm down and not following thru, which tips off the batter and allows them to "stay back" and hit the ball. The whole object is to disguise the pitch by making every pitch look the same. Even little things like having the ball in the mitt and having to adjust and move the hands around while they get the proper grip, which also tips off the batter. We spend time working on placing the ball in the mitt a certain way so that any grip they want can be done so it looks the same on any pitch to the batter. We usually have the ball in the palm of the mitt with the seam going from left to right so we don't tip off the batter with hand movements inside the mitt (see the previous pages for pictures of this).

Pitching is 90% mental, any little thing, play, words from players, coaches or parents can change the whole psyche of the pitcher. Any coach or parent has to choose their words very carefully when talking to the pitcher, everything is about what they will do, and not what they hope they don't do. For example, they shouldn't be on the mound saying to themselves: "I hope I don't walk this kid", or "he's big, I hope he doesn't hit it hard". They need to have thoughts of: "I'm going to put this ball where I need to", or "I'm in charge", etc. Coaches and parents have to refrain from statements like: "start throwing strikes" (believe me he's trying), or "don't walk this kid", etc. Make sure you prepare statements and words for many occasions so you don't say something that ruins the pitcher's confidence. The job of coach and parents is to be a cheerleader and keep the kids pumped up, and focused without degrading them or criticizing them. There's a saying that practice is for the coaches and the games are for the kids, I agree. Although you're still teaching during the game somewhat, practices are for working on major things. You should only make slight adjustments during the game, such as moving to a different spot on the mound, stride, or arm angle. Don't criticize every pitch and tear up their mechanics while they're on the mound in front of their friends, parents and fans. Kids are super sensitive and confidence can be lost in a second.

I stress to the pitchers that although I know they always try their best, that even pros don't pitch perfect every game, and that they will have a bad game, but more likely they will have at least one inning where things won't go great, and I will not take them out, and that they will have to learn to fight through those tough innings because it will make them better. It may sound a little corny, but I do tell them that life is a lot like pitching, it's made up of a whole bunch of innings, some will go easy, some will test you, and no matter how hard you practice, try, study, prepare, etc., sometimes things just won't go your way. Also they have to look at tough times in their life like it's just a tough inning and they'll get through it and have better innings to come. They can't quit because of tough innings or some things they think aren't fair, like an error, a cheap hit, bad call by the ump, etc.

I'm honest with them and tell them that they will be tested every game at some point and they will have to learn to stay positive, focused, and believe they can do it. Just like life, it's not what happens to you, but how you handle what happens to you.

New Pitchers

This can be an 8 or 12 year old, it doesn't matter. But in either case, I strongly suggest, and this is from experience with all types of new and young pitchers. If it's their first year pitching (and they have to start at some point). Only have them pitch from the "stretch" versus the "windup". Balance is the key to pitching that sets everything in motion and once out of balance everything breaks down which is a big reason we like using the stretch, there's less to go wrong from a balance standpoint.

The simple reason for this is you need them to build some confidence as soon as they can, and the stretch has fewer mechanics to go wrong. Contrary to some beliefs, pitching from the stretch does NOT reduce the velocity of the pitch by very much. In fact, some of the best pitchers today only pitch from the stretch. Especially at an early age, there's enough to watch and have them learn, so this allows you and the pitcher to take it in smaller chunks. We've coached some of the most successful youth pitchers in our area, and all of them have worked from the stretch right up through 11 years old. Sometimes if one of our pitchers does struggle in a game from the windup we have them go to the stretch to limit the mechanics and change the pitchers' psychology. After their 11 year old season we immediately begin working on the windup.

Pages 25-26 takes you through the windup and stretch process in increments. There's many different stances, body positions, movements, etc., and it's not imperative that every pitcher looks like they came out of a cookie cutter, they will all have different styles. Every person has different body "makeups" that either limit, or allow different types of movements with the legs, trunk, hips, arms, wrists, and even the fingers. For example, I work with a few pitchers now that have 2 totally different body makeups, one is tall and thin with long legs, long arms, and long fingers. The other is a little shorter and has a shorter torso, shorter legs, shorter arms, and short fingers, but stronger legs and hips.

I can get them do do some things similar things as far as mechanics, but some things just won't be as easy for one versus the other. Now, the shorter one has a stronger trunk and hips, so he can get away with less than perfect mechanics to get good velocity, where as the taller, thinner pitcher doesn't have the trunk and hip strength, he has to be a lot more controlled with his delivery to make sure he's using his trunk and hips correctly and everything is "timed" right or he loses velocity very quickly, but this taller, thinner boy with his long arms has a very good "whip action" in his delivery that helps make up for the weaker hips, and the shorter boy can't physically right now use his arms the same way, so each one has some minuses and pluses. Even though they can each be taught through proper exercise, conditioning, and flexibility training to improve certain areas, the physical makeup of a pitcher will dictate in some aspects of velocity, ball movement, etc.

Pitch Location: This may sound complicated but it's really not, I refer to 2 things in a game regarding a certain pitch: Situation and scenerio. The situation is like if it's snowing, all you know is that it's snowing, it's wet, and slippery, but a scenerio is what happens if you drive in it, or drive in it with bald tires. Every pitch has a situation and scenerio. If a guy is on 2nd with 2 outs, the situation is you have no force out at any base except first and their last batter is up. The scenerio is, if you walk him, you get to the best part of the order with a kid in scoring position. So your strategy might have to be, we can't walk this kid, so we'll take a chance throwing over the middle to get strikeout or easy out. On the other hand, if their biggest hitter is up with a not so good hitter on deck, the scenerio now is, I have an open base, and I can pitch him low and outside and try to force a ground ball, knowing if I walk him the situation changes to a force in the infield, which in turn changes the scenerio. As you and your pitcher learn how to "work" a batter you'll both gain expereince in all sorts of situations and scenerios you'll build a mental library of how you handled those last time and what the results were.

Although situations may be the same, no 2 scenerios are alike (just like a snowflake). Depending on the inning, score, runners, hitters, pitchers game so far, other pitchers game so far, etc., the scenerios are all different. the batter, what he's done the last at bats, what he's doing that at bat, and what you need to try to make them do. Big thing is keeping kids off balance, changing loactions. Most kids don't adjust well to an outside pitch followed by an outside pitch.. The "plane" (horizontal line where the ball is at the plate) needs to change on every pitch, unless it's simply a situation where it's a kid that you have to keep it low and outside on. Kids with a long swing usually have a harder time with fast balls at chest level, where as kids with a short, compact swing have a harder time with the changeup because it is a quick short swing they don't stay back as well. Visit our web site at: www.youthpitcher.com for pitching strategies.

Sequence of Proper Pitching

I could make this into a book all by itself, and make it very difficult for the kids and coaches or parents to figure out how to teach it or what it should look like. Some "experts" like to use so much jargon, technical terms, and pages of explanations that it turns most youth coaches and parents off and they either don't finish reading it, or decide that they can't fully understand it and teach it, or they just decide that it's not that important and their youth pitcher doesn't need all of this.

I'm going to show you the sequence in a few short pages, but first you do need to understand a few things. There isn't only one way to do everything, if there was, than only one pitcher could ever be any good. Kids' bodies are all sizes and shapes, and by this virtue there's built in limitations or possibilities right out of the gate (or right off the mound in this case). Although every pitcher can improve by working on the right mechanics, and I would never tell any kid they "can't" do something, that word doesn't exist to me. But realize that depending on the age, experience level, and things about the body none of us can comprehend, we can't control everything so we take what a pitcher generally has as a base and go from there.

So many things may be already built into the makeup of the body that allows or disallows major changes, so with this it's important to remember that not all pitchers will throw the same. Some have great mechanics but can't throw strikes in a game, some have very poor mechanics and throw harder than everyone else in the league (some of them might even be able to throw strikes).

The odds are with the pitcher with good mechanics to pitch strikes more consistently, have more fun, and therefore pitch longer than the ones that don't have good mechanics.

There are some basics that need to be worked on. All pitchers are not created equal, and with that we decide that some things they do are within a certain range of acceptable and move on. To spend weeks on end trying to force a kid to have the "perfect form", and get him to be 100% perfect on his landing foot, or his arm angle that he spends too much time thinking is a huge mistake. Pitching should be and is a very natural, fluid motion. Although with hard work, patience, and the right instructor the pitcher can develop "solid" mechanics and pitch with fluidity, not as a robot. There's "mechanics" and there's "mechanical", we want "solid fluid mechanics" that fall within the acceptable range. Obviously the acceptable range is open to discussion, but a good instructor after working with a pitcher will find out where this range is for that specific pitcher.

Pushing off the rubber? This one is open for debate, even amongst pros, and even with the analogy of a sprinter pushes off a block for power, well that sounds good, if the pitcher was racing to the plate, but he's not. The power comes from the legs, hips, arm speed, flexibility, and using the front knee as resistance to create the throw forward with power.

The main items in the pitch sequence are: Focus, balance, mechanics, fluid motion.

Sequence of Proper Pitching

Don't force your young pitcher to look like the photos (pages 25-26) or to pitch like a certain pitcher. If they're young (8-10) you have a good chance of developing a certain amount of style and mechanics with them, but if they've pitched for 2-3 years, you'll be trying to get them into that "range" of acceptable I talked about on the previous page.

The Routine: Some start with the first actual pitching mechanic, I like to start with a mental routine and then the physical mechanics. Here's what I use:

Have your pitcher approach the mound in the same manner each pitch (if possible, depending on the game situation this could change, but the pitcher can find a certain routine no matter the situation, especially in little league or travel ball).

No matter the routine, the pitcher must wait until the catcher gets in his crouch, and then the pitcher focuses on where he's going to pitch the ball before he even starts the windup. 80% of the kids I see pitch, hop on the mound and haven't really thought about pitching, they're thinking about what junk pitch they're going to throw, or they rush to get on the mound and throw (not pitch, but throw) There's a big difference between throwing and pitching. They also need to not only focus on the mitt, but find a spot in the mitt about the size of a dime and hit that spot.

VERY IMPORTANT:

I'm reminding everyone here that when you talk to the pitcher, don't tell them: "try to hit the outside corner", or "just try to throw a strike". This is a very negative approach. I tell all my pitchers: "hit the outside corner", or "after you throw this first ball by him, throw a changeup that goes ankle high". Everything has to be done with the: "what I'm going to do" and not the "what I hope I do" or "what I hope I don't do". (like: "I hope I don't walk this guy" etc.).

The routine is a 3 step process:

- 1st, know how many outs (if you don't know, ask) and If ball is hit/bunted to you what will you do, is it a force out, ball hit to OF what to do, etc. (if you're not sure, ask the coach). Know the situation.
- 2nd, clear your mind and only think about what you WILL do (focus, find the spot in the mitt)
- 3rd, Take a deep breath, visualize (see yourself make the pitch) and pitch

It's important that the pitcher is not thinking about the mechanics. He shouldn't be thinking, "ok, keep my balance, get my elbow up, keep my head level", etc. With practice, pitching in the games should be fluid and effortless looking, it should not look robotic. If your pitcher is struggling with a certain thing like "opening up" his shoulder too quick, you can point that out, but keep things simple and only fine tune during the game. Practice is for working on those mechanics.

Mental Sequence: Approach the mound the same way after every pitch. They need to find a groove, or routine. This helps keep the mind clear and allows the pitcher to fully concentrate. Don't let them walk from behind the mound after one pitch, and then back up over the mound on the next pitch, etc. Obviously if there's kids on base he would have to be careful to not have a routine that has him lose any vision of the baserunners (i.e. you don't want him to circle the mound with his head down).

Sequence of Proper Pitching

From the windup:

- Start from same spot on the mound. It's best to simply start in the middle
- Focus on that "dime size" spot in the mitt, take a deep breath and pitch
- During the whole pitch, keep the eyes on the mitt, don't look down or up
- Bring what will be the "lead" leg back only a little behind and to side of mound (6")
- Turn post leg and bring lead leg up
- Bring hands together at chest (between belly and shoulders)
- As the knee starts down, separate the hands
- Using the front elbow as a "site" to the target (mitt) your hands go in opposite directions, but not completely straight out like a bird. See pages 25-26 for photos.
- The front (lead) leg goes down and then out, not out and down, or swung around
- Keep the shoulders "closed" (belly facing 3rd until foot plant, belly facing 1st for a leftie until foot plant)
- The pitching arm goes back with fingers on top of the ball
- With eyes on the target, shoulders and eyes are level and when the lead foot just lands the arm goes up into the "L" position (or cocked position) keeping the pitching elbow at or above shoulder level
- The stride should be a good long stride (not overly long, but not short either) A good long stride will help build up more torque in the hips which along with the legs is where the power comes from.
- The pitching arm will get to be at about the 1:00 to 2:00 position. You don't want the arm straight up at the 12:00 position. This adds stress to the shoulder.
- At foot plant the front knee will bend slightly, but resist bending too far so there's resistance. The foot should land slightly pointing off center on a line straight home.
- As you start to bring the pitching arm over to the release point, while the lead elbow is pointing at the target, the lead arm should start to pull into the chest (curling the mitt). Don't let the lead arm hang out to the side. Curling the mitt into your chest does a few things. It helps rotate the hips, it helps keep a good balance point so the front shoulder isn't being pulled "open", and it gets your mitt into a good position to field the ball so it's not hanging down by their feet after the pitch.
- The hips will rotate, pulling the back foot off the rubber. The posting foot does not push off the rubber. Pushing off the rubber gets the upper body thrown out in front of the lower body too fast and takes the hips and arm out of sequence. The arm now is out front too soon and now is the sole provider of the power (which in this case there isn't much). Pushing off the rubber can push the lower body out front too fast which now has forced the arm to have to "catch up" to the rest of the body, which again has the sequence out of timing which results in erratic pitching, more stress on the shoulder and elbow, and just poor mechanics.
- The post (back) foot should roll over and off the mound, it should not drag. Once the hips rotate and pull the back foot off the mound, the posting leg will swing out over the top and then down into a good fielding position. The post leg should not swing out and land in front of the lead leg.
- After releasing the ball, the pitching arm needs a good follow-through. The hand should go down and swing past the landing knee and ankle. A good follow-through is VERY important to the health of the arm. Don't allow them to do the "yo-yo" where the arm releases the ball and the hand stops out in front of their body. The follow-through is a means to release energy and if it doesn't do it properly, a huge amount of stress is thrown into elbow and shoulder, but especially the elbow.
- Finishing with the good follow-through the pitcher ends in a good balanced position in a good fielding position. Don't let them follow-through and have their body pulled completely off the mound.

Think of pitching like a spring that you've twisted the top and bottom in opposite directions. If you hold the bottom, it springs open starting from the bottom and working its way up. It doesn't magically untwist at the very top and work towards the middle. This is the pitching motion, it starts (uncoils) from the upper legs, then trunk, then hips, then up into the upper body. The upper body and arm just happen to be along for the ride and you have to be able to control that upper body movement so it's "timed" properly with the uncoiling middle part of the spring. It's a lot like a rubber band taped to the top of the spring when it untwists. The more powerful the middle and lower part of the spring, the more speed the rubber band will generate.

From the stretch:

- Get the post foot on the mound, and with the ball in the pitching hand (across the seams) and put feet at shoulder width apart and mitt on lead leg.
- Keep eyes and shoulders level, focus on the spot to pitch and move lead leg back.
- Take that deep breath
- Bring the lead leg up and then go through the normal sequence from there.

I feel very strong about new pitchers, especially 8-10 year olds (and even 11 years old) to use the stretch. Again, they need to develop confidence in pitching, and there's a lot less mechanically that can go wrong from the stretch. Specifically the "balance" portion of the delivery, and since it's a lot easier to get out of balance in the windup, it's best to take that piece out of the delivery for pitchers between 8-11 years old. Don't let kids think they're losing velocity from the stretch. There's very little lost. In fact there's several top notch major league pitchers that pitch out of the stretch because of the feeling of better control.

Power comes from the legs, hips, and arm speed. There's several things that can cost a pitcher control and velocity.

Things to look for:

- Good balance
- Fluid motion (I've seen some kids get to the point in their delivery when the arms are apart and stop for an instant). Once the motion starts there's no point in the delivery that should stop or hesitate.
- "Closed shoulders". This is one of the hardest things for most young pitchers, it does feel a little un-natural to have the belly facing toward third (1st for a leftie) until foot plant (see pages 25-26 for photos). What typically happens is just before foot plant the shoulder and upper body turns toward home plate and now the arm gets dragged through. Usually if they're throwing balls low and outside the shoulders are one of the first things to watch.
- Holding the ball too tight. Some kids squeeze the ball too tight and this can lead to balls going in the dirt. The ball should not be touching the palm, it should only be touching the first 2-3 knuckles.
- If on foot plant the lead knee is straight and has no flex, the ball will usually sail high in this case. The front leg is a huge part of the delivery because it provides resistance which allows the ball to be thrown with velocity. Try standing on the post leg and just throw the ball without the front leg touching the ground. Also, the knee should not bend too much either on foot plant. Too much knee bend changes the release point and usually drops the pitching elbow below the shoulder which takes velocity and creates stress on the shoulder and elbow.

The next few pages are laid out for various styles of learning. Some coaches like pictures, some like explanations, and some kids may be looking at this so I want to appeal to all audiences.

Pitching Sequence / Good Mechanics
Same routine all the time.

These images are in order from left to right.
(Side, front, & rear view in sequence)



Pitching Sequence / Good Mechanics & Details

Same routine all the time.

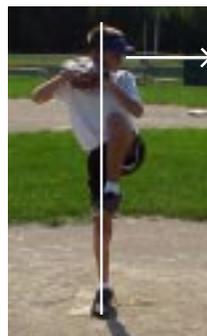
These images are in order from left to right.
(Side, front, & rear view)



Stand straight, eyes on target



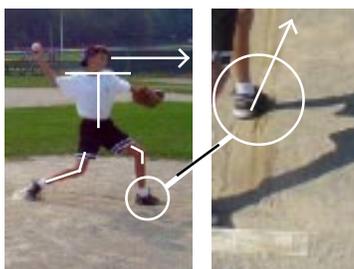
Start motion. Lead foot steps only 6-8 inches back. Eyes on target.



Bring lead foot around and straight up at least belt high. Head level & eyes on target.



Lead leg goes down & out, arms apart. Line up front elbow to target. Head over back knee. Eyes on target.



Shoulders "closed" & level (belly faces 3rd base at foot plant). Eyes level & on target. With chin above belt buckle & shoulders level & closed this should form a "T". Back knee slightly bent down and in & front knee with slight bend. Mitt curling to chest. Lead foot slightly angled and on line at foot plant.



Back foot is pulled (rolled) off mound with hip turn. Upper body straight, head level, eyes on target & mitt to chest



Follow-thru with flat back. Pitching hand swings past front knee. Back foot pulled off mound. Eyes level and on target.



Finish in good balanced fielding position with eyes level and on target.



Shoulders & eyes level.



Eyes level, shoulders closed & straight upper body.



Shoulders closed at foot plant, shoulders & eyes level. Mitt curls to chest.



Hand follows through below knee. Flat back, eyes level.



Finish in a good balanced fielding position on balls of feet.



From the stretch, start with ball in pitching hand and front foot extended. After focusing on target, while bringing frontfoot back, bring ball into mitt at chest level. Take a deep breath and bring lead foot up to start motion.

Pitching Sequence / Poor Mechanics



Out of balance. Don't lean back



Step (rocker step) is too far back.



Out of balance. Body not straight. Leaning back



Glove is too low.



Glove too far from chest. Poor balance.



No "Karate Kid". Arms don't go straight out in opposite directions. Bad timing.



Fingers under the ball. When hands separate to go back, fingers should be on top of ball, with ball facing 2nd base.



Skipping rocks & out of balance.



Lead leg during motion doesn't go high enough. Poor timing.



"Raring back" (leaning) to try and throw hard.



Elbow below shoulder. Shoulders "open" (belly facing plate) and back foot is pushing off the rubber.



Bad timing. Upper body is too far out in front and over front knee at foot plant. Shoulders are opening up too soon.



Shoulders "open" too soon & elbow below shoulders.



Upper body bent forward, head tilted, and pitching arm is straight back.



Shoulders "open" too soon, head is tilting & eyes are not level.



Back foot dragging straight off the mound & poor follow-thru.



Don't play "yo-yo" on the follow-through. Here the arm and hand stops out in front of body or resists swing out & past lead knee.

These are only a very few samples of poor mechanics. Many times one part of a mechanic might be perfect, while a slight problem with another part in the same photo goes un-noticed by a new or young coach.

Fielding the Position

This is an area often overlooked. Make sure your pitchers get some work at fielding the position. Don't let them pick up a stopped ball with their mitt. On a slow bunt where the ball is stopping, they should get right over the ball and push the ball down into the ground so they can get a good grip on the ball. Too many kids try to pick it up like it's a hot coal with their finger tips.

On balls hit within 10 feet of home plate, they need to work on throwing the ball to 1st base on the inside of the bag (not to where the throw will take the 1st baseman's mitt into the runner). They need to grip the ball good first and not too far back in there hands, stand up quickly and throw more like a catcher, short and quick from the ear. Too many times the pitcher winds up the throw and it sails over the 1st baseman.

Also have the pitcher work on getting a ball on a bunt or slow grounder and turning and planting their lead foot towards 2nd or 3rd to make a good throw to get a force out at 2nd or 3rd.

Another little item. If there's a foul ball above the catcher, teach your pitcher to simply point up in the direction of the ball to the catcher. Too many times at this age the pitcher is yelling left, and he means the catchers right, etc. and they confuse the catcher. They should point and yell "up" or "side" (meaning the ball is not above them but too the fence on either side of the plate).

Drills / Tips

Drills should be done throughout the season, not just off-season. (2 times per week).

Keep them simple. Don't try to use 10 different drills 5 days a week with young kids. They will NOT respond to pressure from you to do this. No matter how bad you want it for them, kids have different priorities and unless you mix up your practices, fun, and drills, they will NOT improve. It's not quantity, but quality practices.

There's actually 2 kinds of mental focus needed, one is for practice and drills because it takes a different mind-set to practice without game situations and see why it's benefitting the them, versus the instant results found in game situations. It's very difficult for kids to see how practice now makes them better next year or in 3 months. Kids respond better to more visual and short sentences than to long speeches, 4 hour practices and negative reinforcement.

I like to use just a few drills, and there's more than these, but for the young pitcher, these will be best to use. Don't forget to visit our web site because we're always adding drills to our "drills" section and sign up for our membership (if you haven't already) because you'll receive emails from us bi-monthly with new drills, ideas, resources, etc. Balance is a key to pitching, if you think about it, balance is key for almost every sport, basketball, football, skateboarding, hockey, etc. The first set of drills is the balance drill, then the foot plant drill, and then the "closed shoulder and elbow drill.



Balance Drill: Using a 2x4 or 4x4 (or even the steps in your house). Have them stand sideways on the board with their post foot on the board (like from the stretch pitching position), have their front (lead) leg on the ground, have them pull the front leg up and hold for a 3 count, then put the leg straight down, take a breath and do it again. They should do 10 of these. Now have them do the same drill, but instead of taking a breath when the front foot comes back down, have them bring the foot down, touch the ground and bring it right back up and hold again for a 3 second count and do 10 of these.



Foot Plant Drill: Either using the mound or even the foul line infield grass or the side of your driveway. If using the mound, take your foot and drag a liline from the middle of the mound toward home plate about 8 feet long. Have your pitcher go through the entire pitch (without a ball), and keeping their eye on the target, see if they land with their foot anywhere on this line. It doesn't need to land right in the middle. Do this drill 10-15 times. To use the foul line or driveway, have them stand sideways along the foul line or where the grass meets the driveway and then do this motion and land their plant foot should land on the line where the grass meets the dirt or the grass meets the driveway. If the foot lands too far left it will "open" the shoulder too soon, reducing power, creating stress on the arm, and balls will go low and outside. Land too far to the right of the line and the shoulders stay closed forcing the arm to throw across the body and lose a lot of power and create stress on the arm and reduce control.

Drills / Tips



Shoulder/Elbow Drill: Using a batting tee and wiffle balls, get about 10 feet away from a fence or basement wall and situate the pitcher and tee like the photo. This is a good drill for isolating the upper body and a way to focus on the shoulders being "closed" (belly facing to 3rd at foot plant. 1st base for lefties), along with working on the elbow to be at or above shoulder level. This drill also works them on proper hand/ball alignment (fingers on top of the ball when the arm is back. Have a bucket of wiffle balls right next to the pitcher so after they do one, they can just put another ball on the tee. With the ball on the tee, they reach back to grab the ball, once they have it make sure they turn their head and face the target, we still want to get them in the good habit of keeping their eyes level and on target through the whole pitch. Once they see the target, bring the ball up into the pitching position, and don't have the arm straight back, but a little bent with the ball facing to where would be 2nd base and fingers on top of the ball. Now bring the arm up into the "L" position and make sure their elbow is at or above shoulder level (if they don't it puts stress on the shoulder and elbow). Now have them pitch the ball into the fence or wall and follow through like normal. Have them do this in 4 steps (5 times). Step one is hand on ball, and facing target, step two is arm up and slightly bent with ball facing towards 2nd base and fingers on top of the ball, step 3 is the arm up into the "L" position with elbow at or above shoulder level (the elbow should not be more than a couple of inches above shoulder level or it will create stress on the shoulder, step five is the pitch and follow through. Again, have them do 5 of these in 4 steps and stopping at each one, then do 10 of these at half speed, then 10 at full speed.

Another good drill using the same concept is standing on the mound and about 15 feet from a fence or basement wall, go through the pitching motion, at foot plant the pitcher reaches back and takes the ball off of the coaches/parents hand and then face the target again and finish the motion following the same steps from the above drill. Again, this forces the "closed" shoulder position and you can literally walk through the steps with them by steps, then increase it to half speed then full speed. Follow the same steps for the above drill for this drill (arm back, ball facing 2nd base, fingers on top of ball, "L" position, pitch and follow through).

You should do 2 sets of these drills and rotate them (do one set of the balance drill, then the foot plant drill, the the shoulder/elbow drill, then go back to the balnce drill and so on). For the balance drill do 10-15 of these, then do 10-15 of the foot plant drill, and then 5 of the shoulder drill in steps, then 10 at half speed, then 10 at full speed. After this do the routine one more time. If you can have your pitchers do this at least twice per week, preferably 3 times perweek they get the muscle memory they need. After they've done this routine, they should throw 10 normal pitches from a mound or simulated mound so they can put all of this "together".

Long-Toss. This is a must during the off-season 2 times per week. During the season I do this once per week, and only after a full day after pitching, and two days before pitching. Long toss has been and is still the best overall way to improve arm srength and stamina. It's also a great way to work on the changeup because they're throwing full speed at long distances and using their changeup grip they'll develop the proper arm speed and normal mechanics to throw the changeup. This is what I use, and this is for an advanced 11 year old, you can modify yours slightly by adding or subtracting a few throws and shortening up the distance.

All of this takes place after proper stretching and warmup, and is done at full speed. This is NOT done as a full blown pitching motion, it's done standing sideays like from the stretch and then simply throwing the ball with good form. After throwing 3 balls at about 40 feet, one person will move back 5 full steps and they throw 3 more balls, then back up 5 full steps, and so on. Eventually you will be about 120-150 feet apart. Once you get to the point where they need to throw with an arc to get it to you, have them use the "crow-hop" (starting froma stretchy type of stance just standing upright and sideways then do the crow-hop) to make the throw and have them throw it at head level so it takes one hop to you. That's okay, this is meant this way and it is how the pros do it. For 8 -10 year olds I wouldn't go much farther then 120 feet. For 11 & 12 year olds you can work as far as 200 feet. Base it on the strength of the pitcher, some kids simply may not have enought strength to one-hop it to you from 150 feet. You want to get them to the point where it's a comfortable one hop throw. If it's a struggle, move them in, it shouldn't be torture.

Conditioning - Flexibility

Even at a young age (8-12 years old) it's not too early to begin a light conditioning and flexibility workout. I'm not talking about 30 minutes a day, 5 times per week. I'm talking about 2 times per week and it should only take about 15 minutes. At this age we're not trying to build muscles, just training the body to handle their particular sport better and reduce the chance for injuries, while giving them a chance to excel or just improve. At this age it's also improving their flexibility too. The pitching arm (elbow) is the most likely for injury, so if we want to focus on things that protect the elbow. Those areas would be the elbow, wrist, and shoulder (along with improving the pitching mechanics as well). Any time the wrist rotates it's using the elbow muscles as well, so we use these simple exercises. Also building stronger hips, trunk, and legs will allow the pitcher to use the strongest part of their body more and take pressure off the arm and it will develop that additional velocity. Again, if you're a member with us we'll be emailing you new and improved drills bi-monthly.

Wrist & Elbow (Off-season and only do 2 times per week):

-(Pictures 1 & 2) Using a broomstick or other small round item, attach a rope or string with tape to the stick so the string will touch the ground with the arms out straight. Tape the other end of the string to a baseball. Keeping the arms out straight, and not rotating the shoulders, rotate the wrists so the string winds up and the ball moves up, once the ball gets to the stick, slowly have the wrists rotate the opposite way to let the ball move down to the ground. At first this is a "burner" (they feel it in the wrists and elbow), so have them only do 5 of these each session for the first 2 weeks, then have them do 7, then after 2 weeks have them do 10 raises. This is a great drill to improve the muscle strength in the wrist and elbow.

-(Pictures 3 & 4) Using a hammer, sit and rest the elbow on the knee and arm out in front with hammer up, now slowly rotate the hammer to the left, hold for a 1-count, then rotate it back to the top, then rotate the hammer the other direction, and so on. For the first 2 weeks (2 sessions each week), do 10 rotations of this drill, and then do 15 each session after 2 weeks, then move up to 20. This is another great drill for the wrist and elbow muscles. Best advice is to do the string and stick drill and just do 2 raises and then do 5 of the hammer drills, and then back to the string & stick drill for 3 more raises, then back to the hammer.

-(Pictures 5 & 6) Flexibility is very important. Picture #5 shows how we stretch the elbow. Keep the bicep level, hold the elbow joint and gently pull the hand back. Let your pitcher tell you how it feels, find the point just before the arm resists pulling back and hold it there for a 5 count, then take the arm back up, rest for a 3 count, and repeat. Do 5 of these. Picture #6 shows how the pitcher stretches his wrist, which in turn gives a good stretch to the elbow muscles. Have the pitcher with the arm straight out, pull the fingers back with the opposite hand and hold for a 5 count and then release, and repeat 5 times.

#1



#2



#3



#4



#5



#6



Conditioning - Flexibility

Arm Drill:

-(Pictures 1- 6) Using surgical tubing, or pre-made kit like the one shown. Attach to a fence or door and with elbow at the side and arm out, don't turn the body, but using just the arm pull the tubing across the body and hold for a 1count then release to starting position, then repeat 10 times. Now attach tubing above shoulder height and bring ball or hand up into "L" position and then pull tubing forward and across body like a pitching follow through, hold for a 1count. These work the various muscles needed to pitch.

#1



#2



#3



#4



-(Pictures 7 & 8) With tubing back at waste level and with hand or ball across the body, pull the tubing across the body as shown, hold for a 1 count and then release slowly, then repeat 10 times.

#7



#8



-(Pictures 9 - 12) Pitching elbow in mitt as shown standing about 8-10 feet from a fence or wall, have ball in hand and simply flick the wrist with a follow through. Good drill to build wrist strength and follow through mechanics. Holding a medicine ball about 10 feet from a fence or basement wall, with pitching hand on top, turn body back, then using hips and trunk, pivot and throw the ball into the wall. This is a great drill to develop explosive hips and a strong trunk. This is where the power comes from in the pitch. Another easy drill is leg squats. Have the pitcher get into a catcher's position (with back up straight and butt at knee level), then explode up and off the feet with hands on the head, land on the balls of the feet and do 5-7 of these.

#9



#10



#11



#12



In-Season - Pitching (Game) Days

The first 2 items are rarely used by most young pitchers or enforced by coaches. Most people say: "They're kids, they don't need to get loose", or: "it's hot out so they're loose already". Stretching and proper warmups before a kid pitches not only reduces the risk for injury, but it gives them a better chance to be successful, which means they'll have more fun.

On game days I don't just have the starting pitcher go through this, I have all of my pitchers do it. This is a great time for them to get 5-10 minutes of "bullpen work" between games and keep them sharp if you end up needing them during the game.

Stretching

Follow the routine on pages 9 & 10.

Proper stretching will only take about 5 minutes

Warmup

Follow the routine on page 11.

Proper warmup will take less than 10 minutes.

Mental Preparation

Yes, even young pitchers need to prepare themselves. I'm not talking about isolating themselves from the team for 30 minutes to get psyched up. I'm simply talking about after they've stretched and warmed up, that about 5 minutes before the game have them sit and rest quietly on the bench and simply in their mind they should visualize they're routine on the mound and their fluid pitching mechanics. They can say to themselves: "I believe in myself, I will stay focused and positive no matter what happens and I will have fun". Also they should visualize and see themselves actually pitching and having the proper mechanics. It sounds like a lot, but it's not, it's just a simple mental image they give themselves of the mechanics.

Arm Care

During the game they need to wrap a towel or coat sleeve around their pitching shoulder to keep the muscles from contracting and cooling off. Even if it's 90 degrees, as soon as they stop pitching their arm starts to cool down. If it's a long inning and it's already taken 10 minutes I even have our pitchers use a 1lb weight and do the shoulder and elbow exercises from page 10 to keep the arm loose and start to heat the muscles back up or even squeeze a racket ball about 10-15 times every couple of minutes.

Keep it Fun

Don't put pressure on the pitcher. Maybe simply going over their goal before the game so they have something to focus on, but other than that they don't need to hear from the coaches and parents between every pitch: "come on you've gotta throw strikes", believe me they're trying. They already feel anxious and nervous, they don't need to hear that they need to shut the other team down. They are trying their best, but it's getting through those tough innings and games and keeping them positive that will make them improve. If they pitch a great game, tell them, don't expect it and not give them feedback.

You would be surprised at what parents and coaches will tell pitchers before, during and after a game. They will have some poor pitching innings and games. I always tell our pitchers after a tough inning or game: "hey, no big deal, hold out your hand and wrinkle that imaginary paper up like it was the game and throw it away, forget about it and smile".

In-Season - Pitching (Game) Days

Game Day: I know the kids are on summer vacation, etc. and you don't want to limit what they do, but try as a coach to ask parents of pitchers, if their kid is going to pitch on a certain day that they don't swim for 2 hours right before the game. Swimming is one of the best rehab tools available, but swimming before a game guarantees that the pitcher will have a VERY tired arm, little stamina, and poor mechanics because their entire body is tired, and they'll have little zip on their fastball. I know you don't want to seem like a tough coach or parent, but if you can at least tell the pitcher that the team is counting on them and that if they are going to swim it should be at least 4 hours before they play. At such a young age, every time they pitch it's important to gain confidence, and I've seen it first hand for years. This is one of the biggest mistakes before a game for little leaguers. If it's below 65 degrees they need to have a sweatshirt or preferably a long sleeve baseball shirt, anything to keep the muscles warm.

On Game day they get to the field in time to do their stretch, warmup, and preparation. During the game keep their arms warm with a towel wrapped around the shoulder and elbow between innings. As soon as possible after the game get ice on the elbow at least. If you can get the shoulder iced too that's great, but at least do the elbow. You can use a bag of frozen peas because it forms to the elbow and top of the shoulder. 10-15 minutes is all that's needed. Put a t-shirt between the skin and ice and you can use a towel or ace bandage to wrap the ice to the arm. You can also purchase ice wraps specifically for the elbow and shoulder at most sporting goods stores. During and after the game the muscles start "micro-bleeding" and as soon as this can be slowed it speeds up the recovery. Don't for one second think this is only for the pros, it's just as important for the young pitcher because their arms are not developed enough to handle this stress.

Pitch count. This is a huge area of debate, and there's a ton of variables. Just like anything in life, I don't like to use a blanket statement for every kid, but, I will say from a lot of experience, once a kid has thrown 70-80 pitches, there's usually a significant drop-off in velocity and accuracy, and after that amount of pitches you run the risk of arm injury. I like to use a pitch counter (you can get one at a sporting goods store) for a couple of reasons. I like to simply keep track of pitches as a way to make goals, like saying for this game we'll shoot for 3 innings with less than 40 pitches, etc. I'm not saying at 70 pitches yank the kid out, but all kids are not created equal, some are stronger, some seem to have arms made of rubber, but no way should a kid be throwing 120 pitches.

I really encourage keeping track of hits, K's, walks, strikes, balls, runs, etc. It's something fun for a pitcher to see on paper how many pitches they've thrown for the season, how many strikes, balls, walks, K's, hit's runs, etc. It's also a great tool for being able to set goals and see where improvement needs to be made. I also like to keep track of 1st pitch strikes, it's an important goal to work toward. One bit of advice, don't make a stat sheet that shows all the pitchers for the other kids to see. I make a pitching sheet for each pitcher. They don't need at that age to feel they're better or worse than someone else, they just need to know what they need to work on.

In-Season Off Days

Video Taping

At least once every 2-3 weeks I like to take 10 minutes and video tape our pitchers and review what they're doing. This is where being a member with us pays off. With one membership fee you can send me as many video tapes, 8mm or digital videos as needed for me to review and then I'll quickly get the information back to you with screen shots (still images) of your pitchers. With my review you'll get the still images along with details on what I see and what they need to work on and how to work on it. See page 12 for the best way to video tape your pitchers.

With a lot of other programs you get a video, or a one-time video analysis and then have to keep paying to get more, and if there's new information, you pay again. Most people that write a book like this, get your money and have no intent of updating it. Trust me, I know some things stay the same as far as mechanics, but there's a lot that changes as far as training aides, rehab, conditioning, etc. One annual fee and we keep updating our information throughout the year and then email you the new information. Our instruction guide is continually being updated, and you just pay one fee, knowing you won't have to keep searching every week for the latest information, equipment, etc.

Drills - During the season you need to do things a little different then the off-season. You're still working on improving mechanics, stretching, etc., but you don't want to burn them out during and between games. Let's start with the first day after a game and go from there.

The first day after a game: After stretching and warmup, we just do some light throwing, not pitching. Throw between 25 & 30 balls at a little farther than normal pitching distance, but at about 60-70% of normal speed. That's it. The intent is only to stay loose, fresh, and jumpstart the arms recovery.

The second day after a game we do "bullpen" work. After proper stretching and warmup, I have the pitcher throw no more than 35-40 balls (if it's the day before a game). I like to have them throw 2 four-seamers, followed by a changeup, followed by 2 two seamers, and a changeup. Now I have them pitch low and outside, then the next pitch is high and inside, then low and inside, then high and outside. Since you'll never want them to "hang" a changeup over the middle of the plate, use the changeup for any low pitch. Alternate the kind of pitch and location as well. Occasionally give them the one over the middle. The idea is as a pitcher they don't want the batter to see the ball on the same plane (same horizontal line) 2 times in a row. If it's a fastball low and in once, make it high and in the next time. 2 pitches like a changeup low 2 times in a row is asking for trouble. Make up situations like: bases loaded, 2 outs, winning run on 3rd, etc. Make it fun and put a little pressure on them, like if they can strike 3 guys out without a walk they don't have to mow the lawn, etc. (You're the ump, so it just depends how bad you don't want to mow the lawn). Keep working on mechanics and drills.

The drills on pages 29-30 can be done 2 times per week (not on games days) during the season. For bullpen work, if you have another person that can catch, you could stand next to the pitcher and point out any glaring mechanical problems and have them go through the motion slowly so you can work on it. I have them do it slowly once, then medium speed, then full speed.

I don't use a heavy bullpen work the day after or a day before a game. If you have several days before the next game and you can do a 2 good bullpens (without throwing a heavy bullpen the day before), try to do one where you keep track of balls and strikes. Have them throw 40 pitches, and the goal is to throw 28 strikes to 12 balls. This is 70% strikes. You can use ratios to keep track, but those can be deceiving based on the situation in the game. For your pitchers' goal, 70% strikes is an excellent goal. Let them on one session call the type of pitch, and after the pitch have them explain their reasoning. Page 22 talks a little about "Pitch Location". Visit our web site at: www.youthpitcher.com for more pitching strategies.

Use your judgement too, if your pitcher only pitched one inning and threw 15 pitches, you could do a heavy bullpen day the next day, if he threw 3 innings and threw 85 pitches, the next day should be a light bullpen day.

In-Season Off Days

Long toss. This is a must during the off-season 2 times per week. During the season I do this once per week, and only after a full day off after pitching. Long toss has been and is still the best overall way to improve arm strength and stamina. It's also a great way to work on the changeup because they're throwing full speed at long distances and using their changeup grip they'll develop the proper arm speed and normal mechanics to throw the changeup. This is what I use, and this is for an advanced 11 year old, you can modify yours slightly by adding or subtracting a few throws and shortening up the distance.

All of this takes place after proper stretching and warmup, and is done at full speed. This is NOT done as a full blown pitching motion, it's done standing sideways like from the stretch and then simply throwing the ball with good form. After throwing 3 balls at about 40 feet, one person will move back 5 full steps and they throw 3 more balls, then back up 5 full steps, and so on. Eventually you will be about 120-150 feet apart. Once you get to that point where they need to throw with an arc to get it to you, have them use the "crow-hop" (starting from a stretchy type of stance just standing upright and sideways then do the crow-hop) to make the throw and have them throw it at head level so it takes one hop to you. That's okay, this is meant this way. For 8 -10 year olds I wouldn't go much farther than 120 feet. For 11 & 12 year olds you can work as far as 200 feet. Base it on the strength of the pitcher, some kids simply may not have enough strength to one-hop it to you from 150 feet. You want to get them to the point where it's a comfortable one hop throw. If it's a struggle, move them in, it shouldn't be torture.

They should end up throwing between 30-40 balls. Once you get to the 50 foot mark and beyond, use one throw as the changeup. Remember, same arm speed, mechanics, and follow-through. Only use the changeup up until they have to crow-hop, after that it's just 4-seamers. Being forced to throw full speed to get the changeup pitch to the target at longer distances will help develop the correct mindset and mechanics.

After doing the longest distance, close the gap in half and throw 3 medium speed balls, then in half again (to about the pitching distance and throw 3 more at medium speed. At this point I usually have the pitcher pitch about 12-15 balls at about 80% speed and just let them focus on good mechanics and not pitch location at this point. Save the location work for "bullpen" days. Again, During season I'd only recommend doing long-toss once per week, and not the day after or before a game to be pitched. After doing long-toss I would ice the elbow and shoulder for 15 minutes with a bagie or crushed ice (use t-shirt between arm and ice).

HAVE FUN

Please remember they're out there to have fun. Although you as a parent or coach want them to improve so they enjoy it more, don't push them. Kids have a lot more available for them to do than we did growing up. They will work hard to improve, but because there's so much out there for them to do, it won't be a priority in most cases. I've seen first hand, good parent/coach/child relationships strained because of high expectations from the parent or coach, or a lack of "commitment" from a young pitcher. The more you try to force them, the more they will not like it, and in turn not improve. There's nothing wrong with setting some goals, stressing commitment, etc., but there is a fine line in there that's difficult for many to see.

I constantly evaluate in my head what I said to a pitcher to reassure myself that I've not crossed that line. Once in a while ask your pitcher or child to just play "fun catch" with no instructions or coaching, just play to have fun. Play some wiffle-ball and let them throw curves and knuckles with it and enjoy themselves. They'll reward you for the relaxed fun time by asking you to work with them next time instead of the other way around.

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