

CARE OF THE THROWING ARM

The best care for a thrower's arm is preventative care - the kind of care that will avoid or restrict the development of an injury. The following information has evolved from the author's work with International representative baseball and particularly with Bill Thurston, a pitching coach in the USA.

Common causes of sore arms and injuries

1. Lack of proper stretching and warm up
2. Lack of proper conditioning. Not building strength, flexibility and endurance in a progressive program
3. Improper pitching / throwing mechanics
4. Throwing too often or too long and not allowing sufficient recovery time.
5. Throwing 'new' pitches

The following principles of care should be applied:

1. Proper conditioning of the throwing arm and of the whole body - because correct throwing is a total body activity.
2. Proper stretching program done DAILY, not just at practice and on game days. Thorough stretching should be done prior to picking up a baseball.
3. Proper warm up time. This will vary with individuals and pitchers can usually organise their own timing. The rest of the team should warm up together. Late comers should always be given time to warm up.
4. Teach proper pitching mechanics within the limits of individual variation.
5. Develop a training program that builds strength, stamina and flexibility.
6. Allow players an adequate rest and recovery period. Pitchers will vary so get to know their capacity for recovery.
7. Monitor the workload of pitchers. Know what pitches they have thrown, how many, how long since they have thrown and what they have been doing in the bullpen.
8. Reduce the physical stress of learning a new pitch by reducing the speed and distance. There should be no hard throws or snapping until the pitcher has learned the proper arm action and release.
9. A long sleeved undershirt will absorb perspiration and avoid chilling of the arm while pitching.
10. Between innings all pitchers and any other players with arm soreness should keep the arm warm and loose. A jacket and/or a light throw will suffice.
11. Sustained hard throwing usually leads to arm soreness. To a degree this is normal. Players should recognise the difference between the usual dull ache and anything more sinister (eg persistent aching pain or sharp pain). If in doubt stop throwing and seek treatment.

Care of the arm after pitching.

1. After finishing pitching complete a warm down (light thrown, light run and stretch). No more throwing once the pitcher has cooled down.
2. Keep the arm warm. Put on a jacket and wear it home.
3. Avoid or minimise alcohol consumption - it will increase inflammation and delay recovery.
4. Day one after pitching should comprise jogging and running, a thorough stretching session, easy tossing with a full range of motion (NOT pitching), pitcher's drills (no throwing) and conditioning drills (pick ups, interval sprints, poles etc).
5. Each subsequent day introduce more throwing, moving toward full pitching on day four or five depending on the rotation. Weekly games take the pressure off recovery time but for good quality of recovery a similar program should be used.
6. The routine use of ice on a pitcher's arm after an outing is much over-rated. A thorough warm down and a solid workout next day will be much more beneficial. Ice need only be used: 1) when there is an injury, 2) there is swelling and 3) when there is a history of one or the other.
7. Relying on rub downs, ointments, manipulations or whatever is the lazy pitchers way of avoiding the responsibility of looking after his own arm. Caring for the arm by developing stamina, strength, flexibility, proper mechanics and common sense about his own capacity is the best way to become an efficient and safe pitcher.