



**NATIONWIDE CHILDREN'S**  
*When your child needs a hospital, everything matters.*

## **Helping Hand™**

*Health Education for Patients and Families*

# **Sports Medicine: Spondylolisthesis**

Spondylolisthesis is the slippage of one or more of the bones of the spine (vertebra) from its correct position. There are many causes for the slippage, but most cases are due to overuse.

## **Signs and symptoms**

- low back pain that gets worse with arching the back or bending at the waist
- pain, numbness or weakness affecting one or both legs
- loss of bowel or bladder function
- low back pain that spreads across the middle and may go down to the buttocks or hamstrings
- stiffness or muscle spasms

## **Increased risk**

- females
- adolescents age 9 to 15
- poor physical conditioning (strength and flexibility)
- personal or family history of spondylolysis or spondylolisthesis
- sports that require repetitive hyperextension (football, wrestling, gymnastics, weightlifting, dance, tennis, volleyball)
- poor warm-up before practice or competition

## **Treatment**

- Medicine can help with inflammation and pain.
  - Anti-inflammatory medicines, such as ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) or naproxen (Aleve®) may be recommended. Take these as directed by your health care provider.
  - Other minor pain relievers, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

- Cold and heat can be used.
  - Cold should be applied for 10 to 15 minutes every 2 to 3 hours for swelling and after any activity that makes symptoms worse. Use ice packs or an ice massage.
  - Heat may be used before performing stretching and strengthening activities prescribed by your health care provider or athletic trainer. Use a heat pack or warm soak. Apply for 10 to 15 minutes.
- A back brace may be prescribed to help with pain control and support.
- Exercises to improve strength, flexibility and proper body mechanics are important to improve pain and help prevent worsening of the condition. These should be done under supervision of a physical therapist or athletic trainer.
- Surgery may be recommended if pain persists, the condition worsens, or there are signs of nerve damage.

## How to prevent

- Use proper lifting and posture techniques when lifting or sitting for long periods.
- Do correct warm-up and stretching before practice or competition.
- Maintain proper conditioning, back and hamstring flexibility, strength and endurance and cardiovascular fitness.

## When to call the health care provider

Call your health care provider or the **Sports Medicine team** at **(614) 355-6000** if:

- symptoms get worse after 2 to 4 weeks, even with treatment
- you develop numbness, weakness or loss of bowel or bladder functions
- new, unexplained symptoms develop

To schedule an appointment with Sports Medicine, visit [NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling](https://NationwideChildrens.org/SportsMedicineScheduling) or scan this code with your camera phone.

