

Sending Your Kid to Football Camp? You May Want to Reconsider.

By now you have probably heard of CTE or Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy, a progressive, degenerative disease that destroys the brain. Most people associate it with military veterans, pro-football players and repeated traumatic, concussive blows to the head. But that's far from a complete picture.

What Every Parent Needs to Know.

CTE is also caused by repeated sub-concussive blows, the kind that occur routinely when athletes head the ball in soccer, check each other in hockey, and hit and tackle in football. This means someone can develop CTE without ever sustaining a concussion. That includes children, who may be the most vulnerable of all. And CTE doesn't typically develop right away. It can take decades, often presenting itself long after risky activity has ceased. Its symptoms include memory loss, confusion, impaired judgment, paranoia, impulse control problems, aggression, depression, and eventually progressive dementia.

How Concerned Should You Be?

If your child's football camp allows or promotes "full contact" hitting and tackling in training and scrimmages, you need to be very concerned. In fact, don't drop them off. There's a good reason that the NFL and Ivy League schools have virtually removed hitting from football practice. Youth soccer has also eliminated "heading." Youth hockey has eliminated checking. And the [Flag Until 14](#) movement (promoting flag football until 14 years of age) is gaining momentum.

It is only a matter of time before youth football follows suit and eliminates contact from practice, but until they take the steps to protect your children, your children are relying on you. Don't let them down.

How Real is the Risk?

For generations, American families have cheered from the sidelines as their children took hits and got their "bells rung." Why all the concern now? Well, the sad fact is we didn't know what we didn't know. CTE can't be diagnosed until after death, and if athletes developed erratic behavior later in life, it was easy to blame it on something else. That's exactly what's happened to us. Now we all need to know better.

Consider this recent study performed by a brain bank in Florida. They examined the brains of 63 people who had played contact sports. Twenty-one, or an astonishing 33%, were determined to have developed CTE. They examined an additional 200 brains from people with no history of contact sports. Zero had CTE. What's that mean? The risk of CTE is high and very real. Yet it is also 100% preventable. Don't play contact sports.

Don't Settle for Less than the Complete Elimination of Blows to the Head

Perhaps because of the tradition, popularity and money associated with football, there is real reluctance to radically change the sport. Instead the industry is promoting new safety gear, rule changes and distractions such as "Heads Up Football", presented as a "comprehensive approach to safer football." But while these things may reduce risk, as long as there is potential for blows to the head, risk is still there. Don't let anyone convince you to accept it. Your children and their brains are far too precious.

If you could hear the gut wrenching stories we hear every day from affected families through our foundation, you would understand our passion for stopping this terrible, degenerative disease. For more information, visit stopcte.org.