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For Kids



Kids Home



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Sports are a great way to have fun and stay active. Kids have lots of choices about which sports to do and whether to compete in sports or just play them for fun. One kid might be happy to shoot baskets at the park, whereas another kid may prefer being on a basketball team that competes against other teams.

Lee este artículo  
en Español

Competition can make sports more exciting. But because somebody wins and somebody loses, competition also can make kids feel pressure. A little pressure can be OK. Too much pressure is bad news.

Does your mom or dad yell from the sidelines? Does your coach want you to practice every day instead of a couple of times a week? What if you thought you'd like being on the hockey team, but now you want to quit? Read on to learn more about sports pressure.

### What Is Competition?

There are different kinds of competition in sports. You may compete by yourself, as part of a team, or both. For instance, a swimmer or a wrestler might compete individually, but the person's score may also contribute to the team score. If baseball or soccer is your sport, you might be the lucky one to score a goal or a run, but it



#### Advice from a Pro

Former professional baseball player Cal Ripken Jr. is now a leader in youth sports and dad to two young athletes. Watch these video clips of him answering kids' questions about:

- ▶ [Becoming a pro athlete](#)
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- ▶ [What it was like to be in the big leagues](#)



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usually takes a team effort to win the game.

What all sports competitions have in common is that all of the competitors want to win. But usually only one person or team does.

### **Why Do I Feel Pressure?**

Do you ever have "butterflies" in your stomach? It's that nervous feeling some people get when starting a new school, taking a first airplane ride, or gearing up for a big soccer match. In sports, almost everyone worries about playing well and doesn't want to make a mistake. Believe it or not, the best player on your team and the teenagers who play on high school teams get nervous before a big game. Even professional players feel nervous sometimes!

Feeling a little excited or nervous is OK, though. This helps your body and mind get ready to compete. Your body makes **adrenaline** (say: uh-**dre**-nul-in), which is a hormone that gives you extra energy. But if you're getting so nervous that you aren't having much fun, it's time to figure out why.

### **What Can I Do to Ease Pressure?**

When you're competing in sports, you need a lot of energy. One secret to having lots of energy is to get plenty of sleep. Be sure to get to bed on time or even a little early the night before a big game. And don't forget to eat well on game day.

One way to chase the butterflies away is by being ready to play. Try to attend all of your team's practices. By practicing, you'll improve your playing skills and your team will learn how to work together. In some ways, playing a sport is like learning a part in a school play or how to play the piano — the more prepared you are, the better you'll feel and the more fun you'll have.

Try to find a way to relax right before the game. You might take a few slow, deep breaths or do some gentle stretches to warm up your body. Some teams have a group cheer or huddle before heading onto the field. Let any tension you feel melt into the excitement of the first play.

### **Time for a Change?**

If these steps don't help, and you feel sick or sad about your sport more than you feel happy, you should talk with your parents or coach. Too much pressure can come from your coach, your parents, your teammates, or even from yourself. If your coach or parents are making you nervous, talk to them about what would make you feel more confident during practice and games.

A grownup also may be able to help you cope with pressure you're putting on yourself. Some kids want to be experts at a sport, right

from the start. But becoming skilled at a sport often takes a lot of work over many seasons.

If the pressure is too much, it's OK to decide that you want to take a break from sports competition. You might decide to return to the team next season. Or you might keep doing your sport, but without being part of a team.

If neither one of those solutions seems right, it could be time to try something new. There are dozens of sports and activities that kids can do. Your job is to find the ones that you like best and do them regularly. With or without a team, you'll win by being an active kid!

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