

# Debate!

## Should kids under 14 play contact sports?

NOVEMBER 16, 2012 | By Elizabeth Winchester



THE PALM BEACH POST/ZUMAPRESS.COM

What is football without tackling, soccer without heading the ball and lacrosse and hockey without full body checking? Much safer for kids under 14, says Dr. Robert Cantu!

Cantu is a concussion expert and brain surgeon at Emerson Hospital in Massachusetts. A concussion is a serious brain injury caused by a blow to the head or body. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that as many as 3.8 million concussions happen each year in sports and recreational activities.

In his new book, *Concussions and Our Kids*, Cantu proposes that tackle football, heading in soccer and full body checking in ice hockey not start until kids are 14. Kids' brains, Cantu explains, are more at risk for injury than adult brains. Children's brains do not have as much of a protein called myelin, which helps protect the brain. Kids have larger heads and weaker necks and torsos, "so if they fall they are much more likely to have their heads snap backward and hit the ground," Cantu adds. "Youngsters tend to have the worst equipment, least experienced coaches and no medical personal at the scene." Cantu suggests the age 14 for starting full contact in sports because "you have to start somewhere, but starting later is fine too."

Some experts argue that choosing age 14 as the starting point is random because there isn't research to support it and enforcing the restrictions isn't practical. Opponents also say that risks of injuries are just part of the games, and if kids are wearing protective equipment and taught to play the sports correctly, they will reduce their chances of getting hurt. They add that head injuries happen in basketball and other sports too. If Cantu were to succeed with his proposed restrictions, what would come next—placing restrictions in these sports too?

---

► ***What do you think? Should kids play contact sports without restrictions or should the rules in the sports change to make them safer? Motivate your answer!***