

GET A HEADS UP ON Football Helmet Safety



While there is no concussion-proof helmet, a football helmet can help protect your athlete from a serious brain or head injury. The information in this handout will help you learn what to look for and what to avoid when picking out a helmet for your football player.

Start with the Right Size:

BRING THE ATHLETE

Bring your athlete with you when buying a new helmet to make sure that you can check for a good fit.

HEAD SIZE

To find out the size of your athlete's head, wrap a soft tape measure around the athlete's head, just above their eyebrows and ears. Make sure the tape measure stays level from front to back. (If you don't have a soft tape measure, you can use a string and then measure it against a ruler.)

SIZES WILL VARY

Helmet sizes often will vary from brand-to-brand and with different models. Each helmet will fit differently, so it is important to check out the manufacturer's website for the helmet brand's fit instructions and sizing charts, as well as to find out what helmet size fits your athlete's head size.

Get a Good Fit:

GENERAL FIT

A football helmet should feel snug with no spaces between the pads and the athlete's head. The helmet should not slide on the head with the chin strap in place. If the helmet can be removed while the chin strap is in place, then the fit is too loose. Some helmets have a unique fitting system or use an air bladder system that requires inflation with a special needle to avoid puncturing the air bladders. You can find more information on fitting a football helmet on the manufacturer's website.

ASK

Ask your athlete how the helmet feels on their head. While it needs to have a snug fit, a helmet that is too tight can cause headaches.

HAIRSTYLE

Your athlete should try on the helmet with the hairstyle he will wear while at practices and games. Helmet fit can change if your athlete's hairstyle changes. For example, a long-haired athlete who gets a very short haircut may need to adjust the fit of the helmet.

COVERAGE

A football helmet should not sit too high or low on their head. To check, make sure the ear holes line up with the athlete's ears and the pad in the front of the helmet covers the athlete's head from the middle of his forehead to the back of his head.

VISION

Make sure you can see your athlete's eyes and that he can see straight forward and side-to-side.

CHIN STRAPS

The chin strap should be centered under the athlete's chin and fit snugly. Tell your athlete to open their mouth wide... big yawn! The helmet should pull down on their head. If not, the chin strap needs to be tighter. Once the chin strap is fastened, the helmet should not easily move in any direction, back-to-front or side-to-side. For helmets with a four point chin strap system, all four straps must be snapped and tightened as part of the fitting process.

Always follow the manufacturer's fitting instructions.

Take Care of the Helmet:

Athletes should NOT attempt to make any helmet or faceguard repairs themselves.

CHECK FOR DAMAGE

DO NOT allow your athlete to use a cracked or broken helmet or a helmet that is missing any padding or parts. For air bladder-equipped helmets, make sure to check for proper inflation. DO NOT alter, remove or replace padding or internal parts unless supervised by a trained equipment manager. Check for missing or loose parts and padding before the season and regularly during the season.

CLEANING

Clean the helmet often inside and out with warm water and mild detergent. DO NOT soak any part of the helmet, put it close to high heat, or use strong cleaners.

PROTECT

DO NOT let anyone sit or lean on the helmet.

STORAGE

Do not store a football helmet in a car. The helmet should be stored in a room that does not get too hot or too cold and where the helmet is away from direct sunlight.

DECORATION

DO NOT decorate (paint or put stickers on) the helmet without checking with the helmet manufacturer, as this may affect the safety of the helmet. This information may also be found on the instructions label or on the manufacturer's website.

Look for the Labels:

LOOK FOR A FOOTBALL HELMET WITH LABELS THAT:

- Say "MEETS NOCSAE Standard®"¹ as certified either by the manufacturer or by SEI². That label means that the helmet model has been tested and meets NOCSAE performance and protection standards.
- State whether the helmet can be recertified. If not, look for the label that specifies when the certification to the NOCSAE standard expires.
- Specify how frequently the helmet must be reconditioned and recertified.

- Have the date of manufacture. This information will be helpful if the manufacturer has specified a useful life of the helmet, or has specified that the helmet may not be reconditioned and recertified, or if there is ever a recall on that particular model or year.

Know When to Replace a Football Helmet:

RECONDITIONING

Reconditioning involves having an expert inspect and repair a used helmet by: replacing missing parts, testing it for safety, and recertifying it for use. Helmets should be serviced regularly by a licensed NAERA2 member.

DO NOT allow your athlete to use a used helmet that has not been recently recertified for use by a NAERA reconditioner.

For a complete list of licensed recertifiers, visit the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS): <https://www.nfhs.org/media/1018264/10-2020-nocsae-reconditioners.pdf>.

Only companies that are licensed by NOCSAE® can recertify a helmet. All NAERA members are licensed by NOCSAE®.

10 AND OUT

Football helmets should be replaced no later than 10 years from the date of manufacture. Many helmets will need to be replaced sooner, depending upon wear and tear.



¹ National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment: www.nocsae.org

² Safety Equipment Institute (SEI) is an independent and nationally accredited certification body: www.seinet.org