

# GET A HEADS UP ON CATCHER'S HELMET SAFETY



While there is no concussion-proof helmet, a catcher's 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 baseball or softball catcher.

## JUST FOR CATCHERS:

Catchers use a special helmet and need other equipment not used by other players. A catcher's helmet usually comes in either a one-piece style that looks like a hockey goalie mask or a two-piece style that includes a separate mask.



## 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

No matter which style of catcher's helmet is used, the helmet should fit snugly all around, with no spaces between the pads and the athlete's head. Athletes should NOT wear anything under their catcher's helmet, unless recommended by a health care professional. This includes a baseball cap. Wearing a baseball cap under the helmet may prevent the helmet from fitting properly.

### 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

An athlete should try on the helmet with the hairstyle he or she will wear for practices and games. Helmet fit can change if the athlete's hairstyle changes. For example, a long-haired player who gets a very short haircut will need to adjust the fit of the helmet.

### COVERAGE

A catcher's helmet should not sit too high or low on their head. To check, make sure the catcher's mask rests flat on the front of the catcher's helmet. For the two-piece style catcher's helmet, you can tighten or loosen the straps on the sides and top of the face mask to adjust how tightly they grip the helmet.

### VISION

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

## TAKE CARE OF THE HELMET:

### 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. Check for missing or loose parts or padding before the season and regularly during the season. Be sure to replace face masks if they are bent.

### 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 catcher's 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 CATCHER'S HELMET WITH LABELS THAT:

- Have the date of manufacture. This information will be helpful in case the helmet is recalled.
- Say NOCSAE<sup>®</sup> <sup>1</sup> certified. That label means that the helmet has been tested for safety and meets safety standards.

If the helmet is not new, you should also look for a label that includes the date the helmet was expertly repaired and approved for use (reconditioned/recertified). Helmets that have been properly conditioned and recertified will have a label with the date of recertification and the name of the conditioning company.

<sup>1</sup> National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment: [www.nocsae.org](http://www.nocsae.org)

<sup>2</sup> National Athletic Equipment Reconditioning Association: [www.naera.net](http://www.naera.net)

## WHEN TO REPLACE A CATCHER'S HELMET:

### CHECK THE LABEL

Be sure to follow safety labels on the helmet on when to replace the helmet. Some catcher's helmets have a label that says that it should not be reconditioned. Helmets with this label will also include how long the helmet can be used. However, some of these helmets may need to be replaced sooner, depending upon wear and tear.

### RECONDITIONING

Reconditioning involves having an expert inspect and repair a used helmet by: fixing cracks or damage, replacing missing parts, testing it for safety, and recertifying it for use. Helmets should be reconditioned regularly by a licensed NAERA<sup>2</sup>-member. DO NOT allow your athlete to use a used helmet that is not approved/recertified for use by a NAERA reconditioner.



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