

# cheerleading injury prevention

Many cheerleading injuries can be prevented by increasing the level of awareness and knowledge among cheerleaders, parents and coaches. Cheerleading injuries range from mild conditions, such as sprains and strains, to very serious conditions, including fractures and head, spine and internal injuries. Cheerleading has become much more dangerous in the past two decades as stunts and tumbling routines become more dramatic and risky. Sixty-five percent of all serious injuries among girls are from cheerleading, with many males being injured from cheerleading as well.

## common injuries

- Sprains and strains, predominantly in knees, ankles and wrists
- Shin splints
- Fractures, usually involving upper extremities
- Concussions and spinal cord injuries
- Muscle strains to the hip adductors (groin), hamstrings (back of thighs) and back
- Impact injuries, including bruises and muscle contusions
- Over-use injuries
- Dehydration/malnutrition

## preventing cheerleading injuries

- Establish a good stretching program for the upper and lower body muscles, including the back/trunk, gastrocnemius/soleus (calves), hamstrings, quadriceps (front of thighs), hip flexors (front of hips) and adductors. Stretches should be static (no bounce) and held for at least 30 seconds. It is important to stretch after every practice/event.
- Establish a good strengthening program for upper and lower body muscles, including the large shoulder and arm muscles (deltoids, biceps and triceps), back/trunk, ankles, quadriceps, hamstrings and abdominals (stomach muscles). Upper body strength is particularly important for tumbling and for bases.
- Hydrate 30 minutes prior to a practice/event and drink a combination of water/sports drinks during activities. Sports drinks are only recommended if practice/event lasts longer than one and a half hours.
- Establish activities during practice that will challenge balance reactions and body awareness.
- Use mats and other safety gear when practicing tumbling and difficult stunts. Wear only shoes designed for cheerleading. Cheerleaders need athletic shoes that will support the ankle and foot. Cushion on the inside of the shoe, as well as on the outside should be considered, particularly for flyers who will be standing on the shoulders and hands of bases.
- Communicate with your squad, especially during advanced level stunts. Catching and throwing must be perfectly timed. Team members must learn to effectively communicate with one another to avoid a dangerous situation during stunts. There should be an agreed upon countdown that all team members use.



## preseason conditioning

It is recommended to have a preseason, progressive conditioning program in place for young athletes to prepare their bodies for the sport. It is beneficial to begin a comprehensive cardiovascular, strength and flexibility training program at least two to four weeks prior to the season. If there are any aches and pains or pre-existing joint, ankle or knee problems, they should be checked during a sports physical ahead of time. The biggest predictor of injuries is a previous injury that hasn't been rehabilitated.

## warm-up guidelines

Research shows that cold muscles are more prone to injury, so always take time to warm-up and stretch. A comprehensive warm-up will take approximately 30 minutes.

- Start with 5 minutes of light aerobic activity, including jogging or jumping jacks, to gradually raise the heart rate and increase blood flow to muscles.
- Spend at least 15 minutes stretching, following the guidelines listed above.
- Spend 10 minutes practicing components of specific event (tumbling, stunts, etc.).

## things parents should know

- Make sure your child's cheerleading coach is certified and properly trained for the job.
- Read the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA) safety guidelines.
- Be sure your child practices and performs cheerleading only when supervised by their coach. Be sure your athlete receives proper training for gymnastics and other stunts and techniques.
- Make sure your child knows his or her ability level and does not attempt advanced stunts before mastering lower level skills.
- If your child sustains an injury, get them the proper medical attention and follow-up.

Never perform stunts when you are tired, sick or injured in any way. You should always feel 100 percent healthy when you stunt.

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