

Cheerleading Safety



Raising awareness and knowledge among cheerleaders, parents and coaches can prevent many cheerleading injuries. Cheerleading has grown more dangerous in the past two decades. Stunts and tumbling routines are more risky. The rate of cheerleading injuries is lower than many sports; however, cheer is one of the highest risk sporting events for major injuries. Over the past twenty-five years, cheerleading has accounted for 66 percent of all catastrophic injuries in high school female athletes.

Common injuries include:

- Sprains and strains in the knees, ankles and wrists.
- Head and neck injuries - including concussions and spinal cord injuries.
- Shin splints.
- Fractures in the elbows and wrists.
- Muscle strains in the legs and back.
- Bruises to bones and muscles from forceful hits to the body, from falls or from other athletes.
- Over-use injuries from repetitive actions.
- Not drinking plenty of water.
- Eating an unhealthy diet.

Put a stop to cheer injuries by:

- Using mats and safety gear when doing tumbling and hard stunts. Safety gear includes shoes made for cheerleading and proper uniforms.
- Stunting only on cushioned, dry and level surfaces.
- Having a good stretching program for the trunk, upper body and lower body muscles. Do dynamic stretches before to any practice or event. Do static stretches after every practice or event.
- Practicing skills that challenge the athlete to control their body.
- Setting up a strengthening program for the core, upper body and lower body muscles. Upper body and core / abdominal strength is very important for tumbling and for bases.
- Drinking fluids 30 minutes before, during and after a practice/event. Sports drinks are only suggested if the practice/event lasts longer than one and a half hours.
- Communicating with your squad during all stunts. Catching and throwing must be perfectly timed, and there should be a cadence that all team members use.

Preseason training:

Preseason training prepares the young athlete's body for sport. Untreated prior injuries are the biggest predictors of a new injury. Preseason training includes:

- Having prior aches, pains or joint problems checked during a pre-sport physical.
- Begin a complete cardiovascular, strength and flexibility training program at least 2-4 weeks before the season.

Practice guidelines:

Research shows that cold muscles are more likely become injured. Take time to warm-up and stretch. A total warm-up will take about 25 minutes.

- Start with five minutes of light aerobic movement, such as jogging or jumping jacks. Slowly raise the heart rate and increase the blood flow to muscles.
- Spend at least 10 minutes doing dynamic stretching and 10 minutes going through parts of specific activities (kicks, jumps, tumbling, etc.).
- Practice should end with a static stretching program. Stretches are held 30-45 seconds each, and done on the most common muscles of legs, back and shoulders (about 10 minutes).

Things parents should know:

- Make sure your child's coach is certified and correctly trained, and be sure your child cheers only when watched by their coach and gets the correct training for stunts.
- Read the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA) safety guidelines.
- Make sure your child knows his or her skill level. Do not try high level stunts before learning lower level skills.
- If you think your child has a head injury, remove them from sport immediately. By law, your child is not allowed to return until cleared by a doctor.
- If your child has an injury, get them the proper medical help.

This handout is for information purposes only. It does not replace medical advice from a qualified doctor or physical therapist. Cook Children's Medical Center will not be responsible for any harm or injury resulting from interpretation of the materials.