



## Common gymnastics and cheering injuries

### Wrists, shoulders, ankles and neck

Combining athletics with elements of dance, gymnastics and cheerleading offer great total-body exercise. Both activities are physically demanding, requiring repeated practice of complicated movements.

Many injuries in cheerleading and gymnastics come from overuse. Repetitive practice of moves and routines may lead to strains, sprains and soreness. Wrists, knees, ankles and shoulders are particularly susceptible.

The variety of turns, twists, flips and landings in both activities may also produce injuries. Tears in the shoulder tendons and ligaments, elbow dislocations and wrist sprains are common. Competitors also face the risk of fractures, sprains and strains of the knees and ankles. Serious injuries to the head, neck and spine—although rare—do occur.



## Gymnastics and Cheering Safety

### Common accidents, serious injuries

**Upper body injuries** Both gymnasts and cheerleaders bear weight with their upper bodies. Athletes may sustain shoulder injuries, elbow dislocations and wrist sprains.

**Lower body injuries** Hard dismounts and falls may lead to lower back pain, sprained ankles, tendinitis, and anterior cruciate ligament injuries.



**Head and neck** Tossing a teammate in the air in cheerleading or a fall from a gymnastics routine may result in a serious head or neck injury. Spinal cord trauma and concussions have been reported.

# How can you prevent gymnastics and cheering injuries?

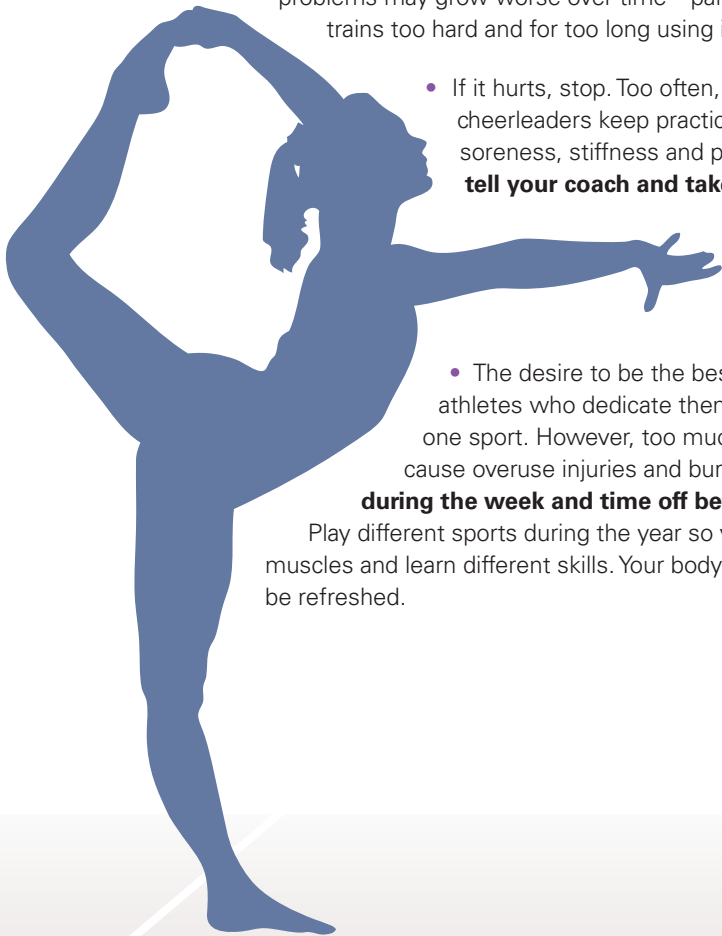
## Proper conditioning and plenty of rest

- **Try aerobic exercise**, like light running, along with strength training and stretching in the off-season. When the season starts, build up slowly.
- **Don't attempt complicated moves or routines until you have reached proper levels of strength, endurance and skill.** The harder the move, the greater the risk of injury, so make sure you're ready before taking it to the next level.
- Stiff muscles leave you susceptible to injury, so **warm up before practice and competition.** Start with light aerobic activities like jumping jacks and running in place. Also stretch, holding each stretch for about 15 to 30 seconds.
- Regular practice is essential to get routines and movements right in gymnastics and cheering, but **constant, repetitive training may produce overuse injuries** like muscle strains, tendinitis and other repetitive-stress problems. These problems may grow worse over time—particularly if an athlete trains too hard and for too long using improper technique.

- If it hurts, stop. Too often, gymnasts and cheerleaders keep practicing despite soreness, stiffness and pain. **If you're hurt, tell your coach and take a break.** Don't be a hero. You'll only hurt yourself and your team.

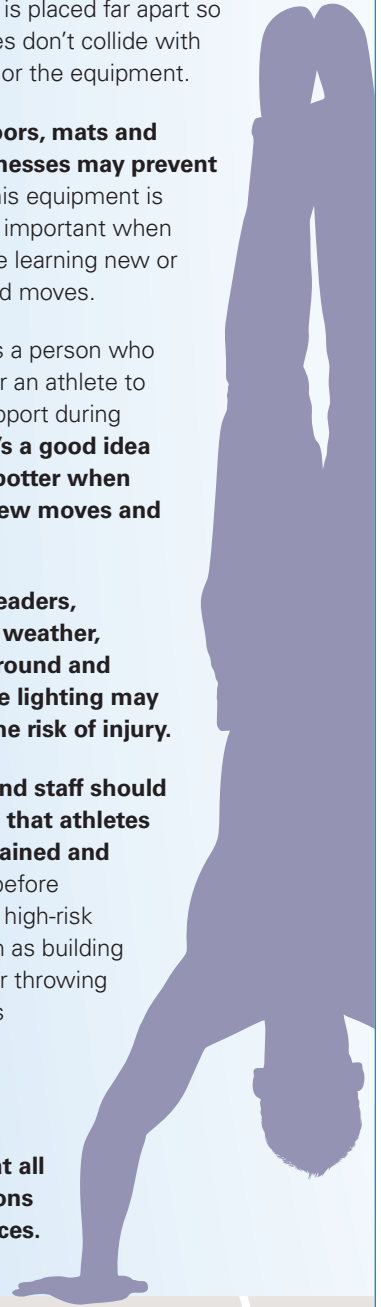
- The desire to be the best may produce athletes who dedicate themselves fully to one sport. However, too much of one sport can cause overuse injuries and burnout. **Take time off during the week and time off between seasons.**

Play different sports during the year so you can work other muscles and learn different skills. Your body and your mind will be refreshed.



## Basic Safety

- To reduce the risk of injury, **consider wearing wrist guards, braces, pads and appropriate footwear.**
- **Inspect all gymnastic equipment to make sure it is sturdy and in good condition.** Make sure that the equipment is placed far apart so that athletes don't collide with each other or the equipment.
- **Padded floors, mats and safety harnesses may prevent injuries.** This equipment is particularly important when athletes are learning new or complicated moves.
- A spotter is a person who stands near an athlete to provide support during practice. **It's a good idea to use a spotter when learning new moves and routines.**
- **For cheerleaders, inclement weather, slippery ground and inadequate lighting may increase the risk of injury.**
- **Coaches and staff should make sure that athletes are fully trained and prepared** before attempting high-risk stunts such as building pyramids or throwing teammates in the air.
- **Make sure first aid is available at all competitions and practices.**



**Reviewed by Donald Bae, MD, and Estee Gelbard, PA, Boston Children's Hospital**

This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit [bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed](http://bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed).



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