

Young Athlete Program: Cheerleading Injuries

UPMC Sports Medicine's Young Athlete Program brings together a team of sports medicine experts that provide individualized attention for injury prevention and management for young athletes.

The goal of the Young Athlete Program is not only to treat athletes when injuries occur, but to focus on prevention and performance training to help them reach their full potential.

Our team of experts use cutting-edge, science-based techniques to help speed recovery, and quickly and safely prepare the athlete to return to competition. Physical therapists, physicians, athletic trainers, sports performance coaches, and other experts focus on prevention, nutrition, conditioning, and sport-specific training, tailored to an athlete's age and level of competition.

Common Cheerleading Injuries

Cheerleaders not only lead a crowd in cheers, but also perform difficult dance routines, tumbling skills, and stunts with partners. Although cheerleading generally is not a high risk sport, the injuries that occur can be serious.

Cheerleaders must be healthy and strong to ensure their own safety and the safety of others on their squads.

Some common injuries include:

- Back and neck injuries
- Concussions
- Fractures
- Ligament sprains in the knees and ankles
- Muscle strains are common in the hip, lower back, and legs
- Shoulder or elbow dislocations



Causes of Cheerleading Injuries

- Lack of good core/abdominal strength
- Lack of good arm and shoulder strength
- Lack of experience with the sport or a particular skill
- Lack of proper equipment for training or performance
- General overuse
- Performing skills too difficult for the cheerleader's current level
- Poor conditioning or training
- Poor flexibility
- Poor nutrition

Overuse Injuries

Cheerleading is a year-round sport, with games and competitions during every season. Due to continuous training and year-round performances, cheerleaders have an increased risk of overuse injuries.

If your athlete complains of pain or soreness that prevents him or her from fully participating for more than 48 hours, evaluation by a medical professional is advisable. Athletes can benefit from hip, thigh, and calf strengthening to prevent wear and tear on muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

The experts at UPMC Sports Medicine's Young Athlete Program can work with your pediatrician to evaluate and treat your young cheerleader's injury to help prevent any serious long-term effects.

Preventing Cheerleading Injuries

Good warm-ups and conditioning are just as important in cheerleading as in every other sport. Practice should begin with a light cardiovascular warm-up followed by proper stretching of the shoulders, wrists, thigh muscles, and hip muscles. This will help improve the flexibility needed for tumbling skills and stunts.

Other ways to decrease risk of injury include:

- Learning proper technique for basic skills before trying more difficult ones. A good foundation in the basics is essential to performing higher level tumbling and stunts.
- Practicing in areas that have enough space, away from potential dangers such as walls, pillars, or crowds.
- When learning new skills, always use gymnastic mats to ensure a softer landing from a fall or drop. Extra spotters also are a good idea when learning or practicing new stunts.

Being mindful of the surface a cheerleader is practicing or performing on is important too. Each surface has a different amount of cushioning and degree of levelness. Cheerleaders often perform on variety of different surfaces, including:

- Football fields
- Running tracks
- Gymnasium floors
- Foam floors

Tumbling and stunts should be practiced on every surface. In addition, when moving from outdoor football season to indoor basketball season, it's best to decrease the intensity of the training. This allows the body to adjust to the firmer, less forgiving surface of the basketball court. Any time a switch is made from one surface to another, adjustments to the intensity of practice will reduce the chance of injuries.

The American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators (AACCA) offers a safety education program for cheerleading coaches and athletes. The AACCA also has enacted rules limiting the height of pyramids; the number of bases needed to perform stunts; and surface requirements for tumbling, basket tosses, and throws. For more information, visit www.aacca.org.

Screening Young Athletes

Our team of sports rehabilitation experts provide injury prevention screenings to young athletes. These screenings can help uncover existing injuries and areas of weakness, and can help prolong participation in sports.

These 45-minute screenings include:

- Flexibility
- Strength
- Functional movement assessment

The results of the screening will help determine if a young athlete needs to consult with a physician, participate in physical therapy, or consider sport-specific performance training. UPMC Sports Medicine has the expertise and comprehensive services to support young athletes.

Contact the Young Athlete Program

Regardless of age or sport, the Young Athlete Program has the expertise, technology, and services to make a difference for your athlete. For more information or to make an appointment, call **1-855-93-SPORT (77678)** or visit UPMCSportsMedicine.com.

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