

PREVENTING GYMNASTICS INJURIES

Each year, more than 86,000 gymnastics-related injuries are treated in hospitals, doctors' offices, clinics, ambulatory surgery centers and hospital emergency rooms.

The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers the following tips to prevent gymnastics injuries:

- Always take time to warm up and stretch. Research studies have shown that cold muscles are more prone to injury. Warm up with jumping jacks, stationary cycling or running or walking in place for 3 to 5 minutes. Then slowly and gently stretch, holding each stretch for 30 seconds.
- Spotting (watching and monitoring) is essential. A coach should spot gymnasts during all practice sessions when complex or challenging routines are being performed.
- Check the equipment to make sure it is properly maintained.
- Equipment must be arranged to avoid the accidental collision of gymnasts with equipment or other athletes during workouts.
- The training facility should have appropriate floor padding to help reduce the force from a landing.
- Mats must be placed under the equipment and must be secured properly.

- A variety of footwear can be worn safely, depending on the activity, the performing surface, and the experience of the gymnast. Options include bare feet, cotton socks, special gymnastic shoes and athletic shoes.
- You may need a variety of apparel and equipment for each event, including hand-grips; specialized footwear; wrist, ankle, or torso belts; knee, elbow, or heel pads; braces (ankle, knee, elbow, wrist); and sweat bands, socks, or tights.
- Be knowledgeable about first aid and be able to administer it for minor injuries, such as facial cuts, bruises, or minor tendinitis, strains, or sprains.
- Be prepared for emergency situations and have a plan to reach medical personnel to treat injuries such as concussions, dislocations, elbow contusions, wrist or finger sprains, and fractures.