

Safety and Injury Management Policy- Training and Competition

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The Wings Rhythmic Gymnastics Club (WRGC) safety and injury management policy aims to ensure safety during gymnastics sessions by assessing and eliminating risks, teaching techniques correctly, and prioritizing physical and mental preparation. It emphasizes the responsibility of coaches to provide a safe environment, the importance of proper clothing and disclosure of medical history, and the most common injuries in gymnastics. The document also provides guidelines for responding to injuries and illnesses, and outlines the steps for returning from an injury. It concludes with considerations for allowing injured gymnasts to compete.

This policy is made by head-coach Enya Tierney and with the collaboration of coach and Sports Physiotherapist Autana Arias.

Gymnast safety during the session

Risk Assessment

Ensuring safety during a session is one of the key 'how to coach' skills and should take precedence over all other concerns. Initially coaches must ensure that the coaching environment (facility and equipment) is free from hazards and risks. This is normally achieved by completing a risk assessment form which would identify the impact of the risk in terms of a low, medium or high rating. The rating relates to the likelihood of the risk leading to an injury and how frequently you believe this could occur. Coaches are required to make a decision in relation to the intended action in terms of eliminating it, or accepting the risk and implementing an approach to

safeguard all gymnasts. Reinforcing safety issues with gymnasts and conveying the code of behaviour will support all stakeholders in ensuring safe and effective practice.

Hazard A hazard is anything that has the potential to cause any harm. Examples of these are dangerous substances, equipment, manual handling and uneven floor surfaces to mention a few.

Risk A risk is defined as an uncertain event or condition that, if occurs, it has an effect on at least one person or object. Risk assessments are a process that identifies potential hazards, assesses the level of risk based on the severity or likelihood of an outcome and then puts in place controls to manage the risk.

Control A control is something that is put in place to provide protection against a hazard and either eliminate the risk or minimize the likelihood of it to occur. For instance, assign a warm-up area for gymnasts far away from the equipment or putting a water station for gymnasts to stay hydrated.

The following are the steps WRGC takes to carry out an appropriate risk assessment:

1. Identify the hazards
2. Identify who might get harmed and how
3. Evaluate the risks and identify controls
4. Record findings
5. Review and revise

Worst Case Outcome				
No Injury	Minor Injury	Lost time injury	Severe injury	Fatality
1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood				
Low	Remote	Unlikely	Likely	Very likely
1	2	3	4	5

Worst Case Outcome				
Risk Rating				
High	Medium	Low		
15- 25	5-14	1-4		

Responsibility of the Coaches

All those involved in the provision of coaching activities have a general duty of care to participants

to exercise reasonable care for their safety both in training and competition and should ensure, so

far as is reasonably practicable that:

- Gymnastics activity, training or coaching takes place in a safe environment, and the equipment and facilities used are suitable, safe and well-maintained.
- Coaches have the required qualifications, competence and experience for the role they are undertaking.
- Coaches carry out coaching duties with reasonable skill and care and in a reasonable, prudent and professional manner in accordance with the Sport Ireland Standards, Cheer Sport Ireland guidelines of Ethics and Conduct.
- Coaches employ best coaching practices are employed at all times and are meticulous in their physical and mental preparation of the participant appropriate to the level of participation.

Coaches should carry out safety checks with all gymnasts in terms of their readiness to participate:

- Any current or previous injuries or illness
- Awareness of asthmatics and where they keep their inhaler
- Removal or taping of jewellery and long hair tied back
- Appropriate clothing and footwear
- Fluids available to maintain hydration
- Activities and progressions appropriate for the group

- Reinforcement of rules and safe practice of techniques

One of the primary safety issues within gymnastics is ensuring that techniques are taught correctly and that gymnasts are ready to learn. There are some key factors that you can implement in order to provide a safe learning environment at all times, in order to safeguard gymnasts, minimise injury and reduce risk.

Physical preparation:

- Appropriate general and specific physical preparation prior to attempting to teach new or more advanced gymnastic elements
- In the early stages of learning, physical preparation should comprise 70% of the total training time with the other 30% dedicated to technical aspects

Mental preparation:

- Introduce a new skill through a live demonstration, video or diagram to allow the athlete to develop a visual image and understanding
- Key points of the technique should be identified by you

Pre-requisite skills:

- The majority of gymnastic skills are developed from basic core movement skills. Therefore, you should ensure that pre-requisite skills are identified and fully learned prior to progression

Progressive skill learning:

- Teach core skills first and when they are consistently and correctly performed they can be added together to develop full elements
- You should expect a fall in performance when adding together movements in a sequence
- Once a skill, combination or sequence has been learned, provide the gymnast with time to consolidate that stage of learning before progressing

Responsibility of the parents

Clothing:

The Code of Dress for gymnastics activities is designed to safeguard the participants and coaches.

The following points should be adhered to during training and events:

- Ensure that the gymnasts wear appropriate clothing, which does not impede the freedom of movement required by the activity and is not too loose as to constitute a hazard.
- The wearing of clothing with buckles or clasps are dangerous and are prohibited.
- Raised adornments on gymnastics clothing are dangerous and are prohibited.
- Long hair may become a hazard and it should be tied back to avoid accidents.
- Participants should work in bare feet, socks or toe shoes.
- Gymnasts and parents should be aware of the risks associated with wearing spectacles and minimise the risks by wearing flexible frames, an elastic sports band or contact lenses to ensure safety.
- The use of kneepads for the entire sessions is strongly encouraged.

Disclosure of medical history

In order to keep the participant safe and have all their needs met, parents are required to be honest and transparent when completing the registration form and disclose any allergies, medical conditions, medication, history of injuries and or existence of disabilities (cognitive, sensory and physical) or learning difficulties (ASD, Dyslexia, ADHD, etc...)

This information will be dealt with the utmost care and in line with GDPR guidelines to ensure the participant's privacy.

As stated in the **Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2012**, we are required by law to make '*reasonable accommodation*' for people with a disability who may be athletes, employees or volunteers (For more information read our Inclusion policy) and the club will welcome anyone that is medically approved to participate in rhythmic gymnastics and/or cheerleading. However, our staff needs to be aware of adjustments to make or key factors to consider when planning and delivering the session so every can be safe, healthy and pain free.

Most common injuries/accidents



What is an overuse injury? An overuse injury is a term used to describe an injury that occurs from tissue damage resulting from repetitive demand over a period of time rather than an acute injury such as a shoulder dislocation or an ankle sprain. Experts sometimes describe it as 'the repetitive submaximal loading of the musculoskeletal system when rest is not adequate to allow for structural adaptation to take place'.

The repeated extreme hyperflexion and hyperextension required for RG is associated with most of the overuse injuries.

Lower back pain:

Usually unilateral due to overuse. It is common in training to prioritise one side of the back to develop certain technical skills because it is more flexible and stronger. However, overusing one side of any side of the body can lead to the injury of itself. Therefore, as a prevention it would be important to work on both sides of the body to avoid this injury. If the gymnast does have back pain some guidelines to recover would be: local heat for 15 minutes, relaxing of the tight muscles, core training to support the fatigued muscles that no longer work correctly due to overuse, training adjustment to work on the body as a whole as best as possible and reduce load until pain eases, and stabilisation work of the lumbopelvic area.

Ankle/knee sprain:

It is a very common injury due to the work that gymnasts do on relevé (where the support of the whole body lays on the metatarsal, feet phalanges and the joints involved) which can be very unstable. Sometimes when the unstable support is compromised a movement and incorrect action of muscles on the side of the foot for example can lead to the involuntary elongation of a ligament that tries to avoid further structural damage. That ligament elongation can cause severe pain, inflammation and poor functionality. The immediate response is to apply ice to help reduce pain and inflammation, followed by compression via bandage and elevation. Afterwards, it is recommended to do an X-ray to eliminate the possibility of a fracture. If there is no fracture the sprain should be recovered in maximum 3 weeks through pain and inflammation management, recovery of range of movement, and progressive load and strength management to be able to participate in the sport normally.

Achilles tendinopathy:

It is usually caused by overuse from training on relevé or half point, incorrect loads/incorrect landing from jumps. The main goal with this injury is a progressive load management so that the tendon can recover and slowly adapt to load increase. Also to remind the gymnast the correct way to land jumps to avoid the injury coming back. Ankle and calf strength is also important.

Dislocation:

Usually from shoulder, knee patella or elbows. It occurs due to the joint being unstable due to anatomical structure of the gymnast who can have a higher tendency to this injury. In this case the main goal is to work on shoulder/elbow/knee stabilisation in different movements and in a static position so that the gymnast can learn to control the placement of her joints during gymnastics movements to avoid dislocation, since once it happens it increases the possibility of happening again, thus elevating tissue damage.

Concussions, bruises, scratches, burns (from carpet):

these all are common accidents that can happen during training. In regards to concussions caused by apparatus falling there is a protocol established to avoid hitting a gymnast through the protection of her/his head by shouting: “*HEADS!*”

Use of “*HEADS!*” - Training with apparatus presents risk to all other gymnasts/persons in the vicinity should the user lose control of the apparatus during throws. When the user of the apparatus loses control of their apparatus, they must shout “*HEADS!*” as loud as they can as there will likely be other distractions/noises in the gym and this shout must take precedence over everything else.

Upon hearing the phrase “*HEADS!*” everyone in the gym must quickly bring both arms over their head, protecting the head with the forearms. Once given the all clear by coaches, resume normal activity.

Also bruises are common due to the technical movements that are repeated many times to do it correctly. In those cases ice or a cold pack will help with swelling and pain. Sometimes scratches and carpet burns can happen but less frequently, which can be attended quickly by our team.

Responding to injury and illness

What to do in the event of an accident:

- Stop the session and direct other gymnasts away from the incident
- Check the injured gymnast is conscious by talking to them and if not, check that the breathing rate is stable
- If the gymnast is conscious then ascertain how the accident happened and if there is any pain
- In the event of a suspected spinal injury check to see that there are feelings to touch in the arms and legs.

IF IN DOUBT DO NOT MOVE THE INJURED GYMNAST

- Look for any signs of obvious deformity of the limbs or joints or abnormalities in the motion of a limb
- Keep the gymnast warm and at ease
- If there is any uncertainty seek qualified medical assistance
- Only after ruling out serious injury should the gymnast be moved
- Contact the injured gymnast's parent/next of kin to inform them of the incident
- If the injured gymnast's parent/next of kin is not available and they need to be transported to a hospital, ensure they are accompanied by a responsible and trustworthy adult and one other person known to the injured gymnast
- Inform the centre management and complete the accident report form
- Inform insurer of any incident where the injured gymnast has been taken to hospital



Remember: If there is any doubt about the severity of an injury then that gymnast should receive medical attention.

Situation	Advice
Poorly children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have the child sit out, kept warm, supervised and call the parents/ guardians if required
Injuries to the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear protective gloves • Blisters, abrasions and cuts should be cleaned with water and then covered with a clean dressing • Ask if the gymnast is allergic to plasters
Nosebleed <i>(Conscious with fresh bright blood streaming from the</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wear protective gloves • Sit gymnast forward so blood drains away • Ask the gymnast to breathe through their mouth, and pinch nose just below the bridge • Tell the gymnast not to speak, swallow, cough, spit or sniff • Provide clean cloth/tissue • Release pressure to check blood flow; reapply if bleeding persists

Situation	Advice
<i>nose which started suddenly)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If bleeding persists for longer than 30 minutes, take or send the gymnast to hospital • Keep your gymnast leaning forward when bleeding has stopped, while you clean around the nose and mouth gently with lukewarm water • Advise the gymnast to rest for a few hours witho
Bangs and knocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply ice (not directly to the skin) to reduce swelling • If the accident involves a blow to the head, medical attention is advocated
Cramps or winded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reassure the gymnast • Sit them upright and advise them to breathe slowly, in through the nose and out through the mouth • Keep them calm until normality returns
Soft tissue injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slightly pulled muscles and tendons or sprains can normally be treated with RICE (rest, ice, compression, elevation) • Apply ice without delay for between 10 and 20 minutes every two hours (ice not directly onto the skin) • A compression bandage should be applied
Suspected serious injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek medical help immediately • Provide support for injured area, immobilise and if suspected spinal injury do not move • Do not allow the injured gymnast to eat or drink • Keep them calm and reassured until medical help arrives
Shock	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calm the gymnast by talking and reassuring them • Avoid them looking at the injury

Returning from an injury

Returning from an injury is a crucial time for a gymnast; these are the following steps the club takes to ensure the safety and well-being of that gymnast

- No more pain/swelling without movement.
- Full range of movement
- Stabilisation of the joint
- Enough strength in the affected area
- Progressive load management: go to a higher level of movement once the previous one does not produce pain or inflammation post exercise.

Injuries and Competition

There may be times when a gymnast is carrying an injury but still wants to compete. These are the factors the club would need to consider when deciding whether to allow this:

- Severity of the injury
- Mental state of the gymnast
- Injury management pre, during and post competition
- Importance of competition