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# In Motion

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## Know the Risks of Cheerleading and Be Safe

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**W**hile cheerleading once involved leading cheers, modern cheerleading involves a highly athletic mix of dance and gymnastic skills, as well as complex stunt and pyramid maneuvers. With these advances, both the injury rates and the potential for severe injury have increased. Cheerleading accounts for more than 16,000 emergency room visits annually in the U.S. and more than half of the catastrophic injuries in female athletes. Cheerleading injuries are most common in competitions and involve the entire body — most commonly the ankle, wrist, shoulders, head, and neck.

In order to minimize the risk of catastrophic injury, restrictions have been placed on stunts. Limits include the height of pyramid stunts — 2 body lengths for high school and 2.5 for collegiate. There are also rules for the number of tossers and spotters in basket toss stunts. Mats are encouraged for practice and when possible for competition. Cheerleaders who are ill or injured should not participate in these complex events. Stunts should also be avoided in inclement weather and adequate supervision is always necessary.

Cheerleaders are encouraged to perform resistance exercises during the off-season to prepare for the rigors of this sport. Also, a regular stretching routine is critical. Regular interactions with a local athletic trainer can help cheerleaders prepare and care for injuries.

Cheerleading has become a sport that places significant demands on the body and can result in severe injuries. Proper attention to safety and preparation can help minimize injury risk.

**For more information on cheerleading injury prevention, visit [www.stopsportsinjuries.org/cheerleading-injury-prevention.aspx](http://www.stopsportsinjuries.org/cheerleading-injury-prevention.aspx).**



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