With the rise in youth cheerleading participation, the number of athletes at risk for injury is also increasing. This reference guide provides information on the most common cheerleading injuries that require treatment.

KNEE INJURIES

A common injury in cheerleading is an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) sprain or tear, which occurs when the knee is twisted forcefully or hyperextended. Athletes with a damaged ACL often describe a “pop” at the time of injury, followed by a lot of swelling within a few hours.

Athletes should see a pediatrician or pediatric sports medicine physician if pain and/or swelling persist. In addition:

• In younger athletes, bone maturity helps to determine the treatment plan. Injury to an open growth plate requires special consideration by a pediatric orthopedic specialist.
• Core strengthening and training in proper cutting, jumping and landing technique may help to prevent this injury.

Knee pain that comes on slowly over time can indicate other problems, such as:

• Patello-femoral pain syndrome (Runner’s Knee) – pain in the front of the knee related to muscle and tissue stress around the knee cap. This can be addressed with proper training in physical therapy
• Osteochondritis dissecans – a defect in the knee’s cartilage that can become evident over time during repetitive activity
• Osgood-schlatter disease – stress-related inflammation in a growth center at the front of the knee

ANKLE INJURIES

The most common injury in sports is a lateral ankle sprain, which occurs in cheerleading by rolling the ankle over the outside of the foot.

A lateral ankle sprain causes damage to the ligaments just below the bone on the outside of the ankle. In some cases a “pop” is felt or heard by the athlete. Treatment varies with the severity of the injury:

• Mild sprains require rest but not necessarily medical treatment.
• Injuries with persistent swelling, pain or any deformity should be seen by a physician.

HEAD INJURIES

A concussion is a brain injury usually caused by a sudden jolt or a blow to the head or neck that disrupts normal brain function. An athlete does not need to be knocked out or have memory loss to have suffered a concussion.

You may observe that an athlete with a concussion:

• Appears dazed or stunned
• Moves clumsily
• Answers questions slowly
• Forgets plays
• Has behavior or personality changes
• Is unsure of game, score or opponent
• Can’t recall events either before or after hit
• Loses consciousness

An athlete with a concussion may have:

• Headache
• Concentration or memory problems
• Nausea
• Double or fuzzy vision
• Balance problems or dizziness
• Feelings of being “in a fog”
• Sensitivity to light or noise

An athlete with signs of a concussion should be removed from play immediately and not allowed to return until evaluated by a doctor. Do not leave an athlete alone after a concussion. Call for immediate medical help if your child displays:

• A headache that gets worse or lasts for a long time
• Confusion, extreme sleepiness or trouble waking up
• Vomiting (more than once)
• Seizures (arms and legs jerk uncontrollably)
• Trouble walking or talking
• Weak or numb arms or legs
• Any other sudden change in thinking or behavior
CHEERLEADING SAFETY (CONT.)

BACK PAIN

Cheerleading puts a lot of demand on a young athlete’s back due to repetitive maneuvers that require hyperextension of the back. Some injuries to the back occur suddenly, and are commonly known as a back strain. Others occur more gradually, especially if the body doesn’t have time to recover properly. Over time, repeated hyperextension of the low back can cause:

- **Spondylolysis** – a stress fracture of the bones in the lower spine, or lumbar vertebrae
- **Spondylolisthesis** – the lumbar vertebrae slip forward, if an athlete with a stress fracture continues to participate in the sport

BRUISES, BUMPS, TWISTS & MUSCLE STRAINS

These can affect all areas of the body.
Recommended treatment is the **PRICE** formula:
- **P**rotect the area with a sling or crutches, if necessary.
- **R**est the injured area.
- **I**ce the injury for 20 minutes at a time. Do not apply the ice directly to the skin.
- **C**ompress the injured area with a wrap. Do not pull tightly, as this can cut off circulation.
- **E**levate the injured area above the heart, if possible.

WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Cheerleaders should aim to stay close to their competition weight in the off-season in order to avoid dangerous weight-cutting practices during the competitive season. Cheerleaders who desire to lose weight should not lose more than 1-2 pounds a week to avoid break down of lean body mass. Weight loss is best achieved using a combination of reducing caloric intake and increasing calories burned. Nutrition tips for good weight control include:

- Give your body energy from sources of carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Do not omit any food groups.
- Choose whole-grain foods, lean protein and healthy fats at meal times.
- Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables and fiber.
- Drink calorie-free beverages; eat fresh fruits instead of drinking fruit juices.
- Watch your portion sizes.
- Choose low-fat dairy products.
- Do not skip meals. Eat a healthy snack if hungry in between meals.
- Limit high-calorie foods with added sugar and fat.

SSM HEALTH CARDINAL GLENNON SPORTSCARE

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes. By working with multiple specialists and care partners, we guarantee your child will get the top care that is best suited to treat their unique injury, improving recovery time and outcome.

Specialists your child has access to through SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare include orthopedists, pulmonologists, cardiologists, radiologists, neurologists, emergency medicine physicians, adolescent medicine physicians, rehabilitation specialists, physical therapists, nutritionists and pediatric psychologists.

Partners your child has access to through SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare include SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, SSM Health Orthopedics, SSM Physical Therapy and SLUCare, Physician Group of Saint Louis University. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and support for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call us at **314-577-5640** or visit us at [cardinalglennon.com/sportscare](cardinalglennon.com/sportscare).

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital and SSM Health emergency medicine specialists, **24 hours a day in the ER** at: SSM Health DePaul Hospital, SSM Health St. Clare Hospital, SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - Lake Saint Louis, SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - St. Charles.