

Water polo - preventing injury

Water polo is a demanding game that requires players to tread water or swim for the whole match. Standing on the bottom or hanging onto the sides of the pool is not allowed. A variation called 'flipper ball' permits standing up and is suitable for younger players. Water polo is a low risk sport.

Common injuries

Common injuries include:

- **Eyes** - irritation from pool chemicals such as chlorine.
- **Hip and knee** - overuse injuries can occur from the constant treading of water.
- **Shoulder** - injuries include sprains and strains.
- **Scratches** - from the fingernails of other players. Abrasions, cuts and bruises can also occur when wrestling for the ball.
- **Facial injuries** - such as black eye or split lip, caused by contact with other players or the ball.
- **Hypothermia** - dangerous and potentially fatal drop in body temperature caused by cold conditions.
- **Sunburn** - from playing outside without sunscreen.
- **Warts** - a skin growth caused by a viral infection. Swimming in public swimming pools is a known risk factor for warts.

Risk factors

Some of the factors that can increase your risk of injury include:

- **Lack of fitness** - an unfit person with poor stamina and flexibility is much more likely to get hurt playing any type of sport.
- **Inexperience** - beginners may be more likely to be injured because they do not have the skills to meet the demands of the sport.
- **Poor technique** - puts unnecessary strain on joints and muscles: for example, poor throwing action or shooting the ball awkwardly.
- **Lack of protective equipment** - neglecting to wear protective equipment, such as a cap with ear guards or a mouth guard, makes injury more likely.

General health suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Exercise regularly to keep yourself in good physical condition.
- Undertake a general strength and fitness program including weight training and aerobic activities such as swimming to improve muscle strength.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after the game to reduce the risk of dehydration.
- Warm up thoroughly before playing. Include plenty of sustained stretches.
- Incorporate stretching into your cool down routine.

General safety suggestions

Suggestions include:

- Strictly observe the rules of the game.
- Work at improving your form. Ask your coach for tips on how to improve your technique and reduce the risk of injury.
- Wear appropriate protective equipment, such as a cap with ear guards and a mouth guard.
- Clip your fingernails and toenails short.
- Wear water-resistant 30+ sunscreen when playing outside. Reapply regularly.

What to do if you injure yourself

Suggestions include:

- Stop immediately if an injury occurs to help prevent further damage.
- Seek prompt treatment of injury. Early management will mean less time away from the pool.
- Treat all soft tissue injuries (ligament sprains, muscle strains, bumps and bruises) with rest, ice, compression, elevation (raise the limb above your heart) and seek advice from a health professional.
- Do not resume activity until you have completely recovered from injury.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Always call an ambulance in an emergency Tel. 000
- Physiotherapist
- Victorian Water Polo Tel. (03) 9926 1552
- Smartplay Tel. (03) 9674 8777
- 'Go for your life' Infoline service Tel. 1300 739 899

Things to remember

- Water polo is a demanding game that requires the players to tread water or swim for the duration of the match.
- Work on improving your muscular strength, particularly of the abdominals, shoulders and lower back.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Smartplay

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