
Water polo - preventing injury

Summary

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 'flippa ball' permits standing up and is suitable for younger players. Water polo is a low-risk sport.

Common water polo injuries

Common injuries include:

- eyes – irritation from pool chemicals such as chlorine
- hip and knee – overuse injuries from the constant treading of water
- shoulder – injuries including 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 for water polo injuries

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.

Health suggestions for playing water polo

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.
- Incorporate stretching into your cool down routine.

Safety suggestions for playing water polo

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+ (or higher) sunscreen when playing outside. Reapply regularly.

Treatment of water polo injuries

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

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.

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