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:

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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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