



Common wrestling injuries

Wrestling is a demanding sport that requires strength, flexibility and endurance along with superb self-discipline and mental toughness. Injuries are common, affecting as many as 50 percent of wrestlers in any given season.

Participants in this high-energy contact sport commonly sustain injuries such as scrapes, bruises, strains or sprains. Concussions or neck injuries may occur when wrestlers are hit in the head or thrown to the mat. Regular skin-to-skin contact may cause infections. Some of the most serious and common wrestling-related injuries affect the knees and shoulders.

Older and more experienced wrestlers have a higher rate of injury, likely because of the increased intensity of the matches and the strength and weight of the competitors.



Wrestling Safety Common accidents, serious injuries

Overuse injuries Repeated, strenuous activity may lead to muscle soreness and tendinitis (inflammation of a tendon) in the wrist, ankle, iliotibial band (tissue outside the knee joint) or other muscle group.

Cauliflower ear Repeated hits to the ear may cause cartilage damage, known as cauliflower ear.

Dehydration Some wrestlers stop drinking water in an attempt to drop pounds to meet weight requirements for competition. The resulting dehydration may reduce strength and endurance and lead to serious problems such as organ damage.

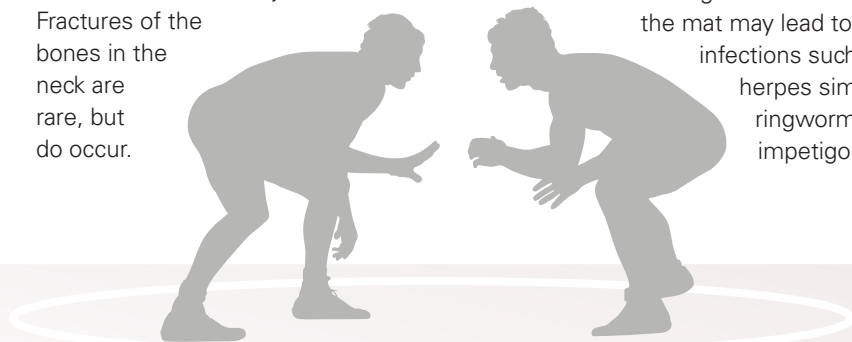
Bruises With direct contact between competitors and frequent impact with the mat, bruises are fairly common.

Concussions A blow to the head or a fall to the mat may cause a concussion. Symptoms include headaches, dizziness and nausea.

Neck injuries Muscle sprains are the most common neck injuries. Fractures of the bones in the neck are rare, but do occur.

Dislocations and fractures Hard landings on takedowns and the twisting and force applied during competition can lead to a variety of injuries: dislocations, separations and fractures of the shoulder; dislocations and ligament damage to the elbow; and injuries to the ligaments in the knee.

Skin infections Regular skin-to-skin contact along with contact with the mat may lead to infections such as herpes simplex, ringworm and impetigo.



How can you prevent wrestling injuries?

Rules are in place to help prevent wrestling injuries. For example, rules require that competitors be paired against each other according to their weight, and some competitions match athletes by age, experience and gender. By making sure that wrestlers compete with wrestlers who are at similar skill and size levels, the risk of injury goes down.

Any injury—even a seemingly minor injury—can keep a wrestler out of a match. Wrestlers should report small scrapes, minor infections and all other injuries to coaches, trainers and staff immediately. **Fortunately, there are many ways to reduce the risk of wrestling injuries:**

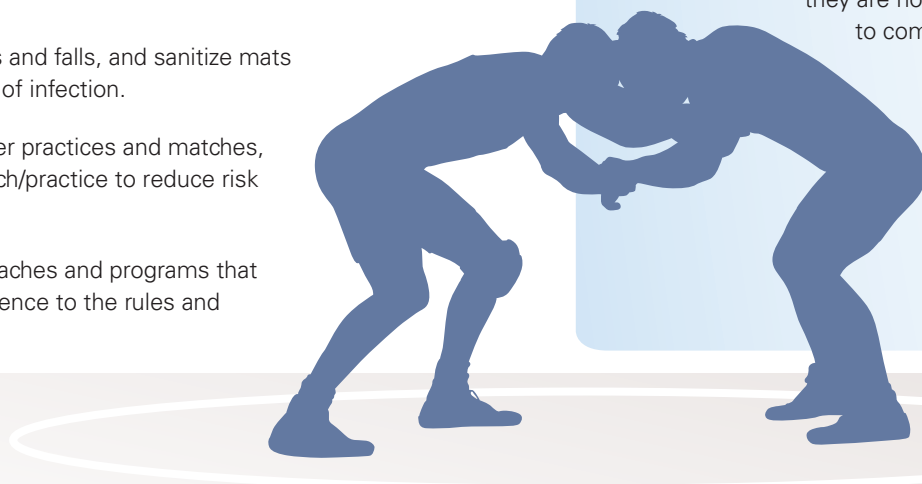
- Learning proper technique under the guidance of knowledgeable coaches can be very helpful in preventing injury. **Wrestlers should be coached and supervised at all times.**
- **The better conditioned the athlete, the lower the risk of injury.** Wrestlers should engage in a training program that strengthens the muscles and increases flexibility and endurance. Studies have shown that wrestlers with greater flexibility suffer fewer shoulder, back and leg injuries.
- **Wrestlers should use quality equipment, including:**
 - **Uniforms** that fit snugly and allow for maximum mobility
 - **Wrestling shoes** that come above the ankles and provide adequate support
 - **Headgear** that protects the ears and may help prevent concussions
 - **Mouth guards** that protect the teeth and tongue, and may help reduce risk of concussion
 - **Other equipment** as needed, such as hair coverings and face masks
- Inspect mats for debris to avoid slips and falls, and sanitize mats when possible to reduce the spread of infection.
- Take routine showers before and after practices and matches, and wear clean clothing at each match/practice to reduce risk of infection.
- Parents and athletes should seek coaches and programs that stress proper technique, strict adherence to the rules and good sportsmanship.

Weight Control for Wrestlers

To reach the desired weight to compete in a given weight class, some wrestlers engage in dangerous behavior, including crash diets and excessive training to lose pounds. **Ultimately, the best way to “make weight” is through a proper diet conducted under the supervision of a coach and a dietitian.**

When a wrestler maintains a weight near his or her weight class limit, losing or gaining two or four pounds becomes easier. To keep a consistent weight, wrestlers should keep to daily calorie requirements and eat a balanced diet. Factors such as age, body size, level of physical development and exercise regimen should be taken into account in determining the daily requirements.

To steer wrestlers away from the dangers of crazy diets and overtraining, most wrestling associations have put in place minimum weight certification programs. With these programs, wrestlers are required to weigh in during the first two weeks of the season. At this point, an athlete's minimum weight is established, usually set at no less than 7 percent of the weight at the initial weigh-in. If a wrestler's weight goes below that 7 percent, they are not cleared to compete.



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This piece is part of an informational series on sports injury prevention produced by the Orthopedic Center/Sports Medicine Division at Boston Children's Hospital. For materials on preventing injuries in other sports, call 617-355-3501 or visit bostonchildrens.org/sportsmed.



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