Promoting spine health for adolescent athletes

QR LIBRARY

1. Watkins-Randall Core

2. NSAC Exercise Library

3. YouTube Playlist - Hips and Hams Stretch

4. Yoga and Mindfulness Resources

5. Know Your Anatomy

Spine Health for High School Athletes:

Prevention and Management of Low Back Pain

PREVENTION

37-55% of high-school athletes will experience back pain.

Certain sports put athletes at higher risk. Athletes participating in team sports, combat sports, high-impact sports (including skiing or snowboarding), and gymnastics are more likely to experience back pain. Older high school athletes are also more likely to have back pain than younger athletes.

As a young athlete, it is important to develop healthy habits for spine health to prevent injuries and to make it easier to recover from injuries by using skills you have already practiced.

Luckily, you are already practicing good prevention by reading this brochure!

Research shows that regular exercise and education are the 2 most impactful things a person can do to prevent back pain.

Other recommendations:

Watkins-Randall Core Stabilization Program

- 8 full-body exercises that can be performed from level 1 (easiest, bodyweight) to level 5 (hardest; weighted with dynamic movement)

SEE QR CODE 1

Watch Your Technique

- The National Strength and Conditioning Association has a video library showing proper technique for common gym exercises

QR CODE 2

- At the gym, start light and increase weights slowly. Generally, avoid maximum weight squats or deadlifts.

Stretch Regularly

- Tight hip flexors and hamstrings are a risk factor for back pain.

QR CODE 3

MANAGEMENT

Ouch! What to do now…

FIRST
Pay attention to "red flag" symptoms that indicate urgent medical evaluation

- You can't urinate or you can't control your urination.
- You have "saddle anesthesia" or numbness around your genitals/anus.
- Muscle weakness or numbness in both legs
- Difficulty walking
- Pain wakes you up from sleep.
- Pain radiates below the knee.
- Pain does not improve despite rest and use of NSAIDs.

If these apply to you, call your doctor, or visit the emergency room.

Most cases of back pain in young athletes can be managed with self-care and physical therapy.

Guided physical therapy involves working with a trained professional who can help you identify the mechanism of your pain and develop a plan specific to your goals and current limitations.

Local physical therapy practices include:
VASTA Performance Training and Physical Therapy
Essex Physical Therapy
Long Trail Physical Therapy
and more…

Dr. Matthew Lunser, Team Physician for the University of Vermont Catamounts, recommends **relative rest** for non-specific back pain.

"Not doing any movement for a week will likely make things worse. For most back injuries, you want to keep some movement to give things an opportunity to readjust and settle."

- Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Perform slower, bodyweight movements and gradually increase intensity over 1-4 weeks
- Use oral or topical NSAIDs for pain relief
- Heat or ice packs can also reduce pain; use for 10-15 minutes 3x per day

Consider a formal assessment with your doctor if things don't improve by 4-6 weeks.

More for Spine Health

- Weekly yoga has shown similar effectiveness to physical therapy for reducing back pain and maintaining physical and mental wellness while injured.
- Other mindfulness practices (meditation, body scan, progressive muscle relaxation) have also been shown to reduce chronic pain.
- Education is a life-long tool. Knowing your body and understanding anatomy can make your exercise and treatment plans more effective.

QR CODE 4 and 5