



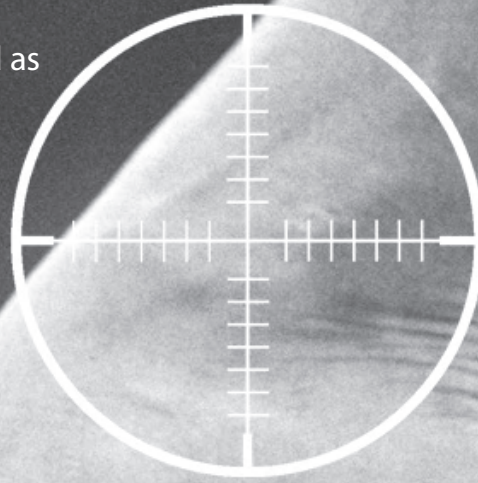
ANKLE PROPRIOCEPTION IN THE PREVENTION OF ANKLE INJURIES

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Proprioception or balance is defined as the unconscious internal perception of movement and knowledge of the body's orientation in space. If we can teach the ankle where it is in relation to other objects (i.e., the floor, beam), we are more likely to prevent the ankle from putting itself into a position that it is more likely to injure itself. >>>>

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>>> There are many exercises that can improve the body's proprioception or balance. The most common of these exercises is easily done with items that are found in the home. The first is as simple as standing on one leg. Have your gymnasts try the following!

Stand on a flat surface with something near you as a balance check, such as the back of a stable chair. Now stand on one foot with your knee and hip slightly bent and tighten your abdominals. Keep your eyes on an object that is around your eye level approximately 10 feet away. Hold this position at least 30 seconds.

After performing this exercise you may think this is fairly simple, but there are many ways to increase the difficulty. The first is as easy as closing your eyes. Without your vision your body has to use other internal senses to keep your balance. Without your vision this exercise can be difficult and dangerous. Please have your hand very close to your balance check.

If you are uncomfortable closing your eyes, you can use some very common household items to make this exercise more difficult. Tightly roll a bath towel up so the towel is no wider than your foot. Stand on the towel to create an unstable surface which should make keeping your balance a little harder than just standing on the floor.

To make this exercise more fun and add a little competitiveness, try balancing with a partner standing 10 to 20 feet away from you and toss a soft ball (I recommend a volleyball or soccer ball) between the two of you. Whoever keeps their balance the longest is the winner. Remember this is a balance exercise and not a shoulder exercise, so do not take the other person's head off with your throws.

When standing on the towel becomes too easy, try finding something in your house that is more difficult. If there is a golfer in the house, I recommend standing on approximately 10-15 golf balls. Lay the golf balls in an oval pattern that is slightly larger than your foot. I would do this on a carpeted floor so it gives the golf balls a little bit of stability compared to a hard surface like wood.



When doing these exercises I would hold each exercise for at least 30 to 60 seconds and complete 6 to 10 repetitions. Remember to keep your eyes forward and your knee and hip slightly bent with your abdominal tight. Also, remember to have a balance check such as the back of a chair within reach.

Helping your gymnasts develop and maintain strong ankles will help prevent ankle injuries in the long run. It is a good investment of time! ✖