

NOT ANOTHER RIP



Alicia Lysiuk LAT, ATC, MS
St. Vincent Sports Performance

It's the dreaded part of your bar workout that every coach and athlete would like to avoid. A "rip" or avulsion laceration of the hand can set a gymnast back days not to mention the pain and reoccurrences that are sure to come. My goal is to give you some tricks of the trade on how to prevent, treat, and avoid rips.

So, what causes these annoying rips anyway? Friction on the hand as the gymnast swings a bar set causes tears in the flesh of the hand. If we know the cause of the wound, then how do we prevent it? There are several things a gymnast can do. First, maintain good grooming of calluses. A beginner, might not have much callus within the palm of his/her hands but as the gymnast grows into the sport, calluses form underneath each of the fingers and sometimes even in the middle of the hand. These calluses are how the body protects the hand with extra tissue. If the callus gets too large or thick, then rips can occur more often. Gymnasts can use different instruments to shave down their calluses. Most of these instruments can be found in your everyday grocery store. Pumice stones, callus razors, and even most podiatric sanders can be used on the calluses of the hand. The secret is to shave the callus down until there is enough protection for the palm, but not until the tender pink skin underneath is approached. Callus grooming can be done weekly to prevent the excess skin from growing.



Dry skin also leads to rips. Chalking up the gymnasts' hands helps to decrease the friction, but it also leads to drying out. Finding a daily moisturizer is key to preventing reoccurrences in rips and helping maintain good skin pliability. Some of my favorites are Eucerine and Cetaphil which can be found in the grocery store. Bag balm is also a great moisturizer with a little bit more oil, and is found in the livestock area of your hardware stores.



Once you have a rip, it's a whole different story! Taking care of a rip is just like taking care of any type of wound. You need to practice the two C's – Clean and Cover. Clean out the wound with antibacterial soap or wipes to prevent infection. Covering the wound seems to be the difficult part. It is hard to get a standard bandage to stay on the palm of the hand let alone stay on while continuing a bar workout. It is important to cover the wound to allow it time to heal and to protect it from further damage. A simple tape grip over top of a bandage can help to both prevent infection and allow the gymnast to get on with their training. I suggest "H" shaped bandages for the rips underneath the fingers. Loop the top two strips around the finger and place the bottom two into the palm. Once the bandage is on all you need is a roll of tape and you are ready to make a protective grip. Have the athlete open his/her hand as wide as it goes and measure from the finger above the rip down to the wrist. Tear two strips of tape at this length. Make sure to spread his/her fingers wide to ensure that the gymnast can maintain full extension of his/her hand. The third and final strip of tape will go over his/her finger. Take a two or three inch piece of tape and fold it in half length wise. Form a tear drop shape with the small piece of tape and adhere it to the two longer strips. Sandwich these together and you have your very own tape grip! Keep it covered for the next 3-5 days or until the wound is healed.

Remember to keep the wound clean and help keep it moist with antibiotic ointments or the daily moisturizer of your choice. By grooming your calluses and having good post care, you should see a dramatic decrease in the amount of rips your gymnasts have and healthier hands in the long run! Good luck and keep swinging. ✘