

Gymnast Wrist

Gymnast wrist is irritation and inflammation of the growth plate (epiphysis) at the end of the radius (forearm bone), where it connects to the hand to form the wrist. The growth plate is made up of cartilage, which is softer and more vulnerable to injury than mature bone.

Gymnast wrist is an overuse injury that occurs in up to 40 percent of young gymnasts. It usually appears during a period of increased intensity of gymnastic activity, such as when a gymnast moves to a higher competitive level. Impact activities like tumbling and vaulting put a large amount of compressive force on the growth plate in the wrist.

Symptoms

Symptoms of gymnast wrist include:

- Wrist pain with impact activities
- Swelling and reduced range of motion at the wrist

Diagnosis

A physical examination and X-rays will help make the diagnosis. X-rays may show signs of irregular bone edges or widening at the radial growth plate. Comparison X-rays are sometimes helpful if the child is not having symptoms in both wrists.

Treatment

Rest from impact activities is the recommended treatment. It needs to be long enough to allow for reduced inflammation in the growth plate and a return to its normal anatomy; this time period can be as short as six weeks, or as long as four to five months. Pushing through pain will only make the injury worse. Ice and anti-inflammatory medications can help to reduce inflammation, but time off is the only cure.

If not treated properly, gymnast wrist can lead to premature closure of the radial growth plate, causing the radius to be shorter than the ulna. This can cause permanent wrist pain and inability to continue with gymnastics. When the pain is gone and the child has been cleared by his or her doctor, he or she may return to impact activities slowly and gradually. If pain returns, the child should stop the activities and see a doctor for further evaluation.