

Summer Safety Tips

Alan S. Nasar

Summer is a time for fun. The sun is shining and there are countless outdoor activities for you to enjoy. Whether your activity of choice is swimming, running, or cycling, it is important to know how to enjoy yourself safely, as increased exercise often leads to increased chance of injury. The following tips will help you get the most out of your summer workout:

Swimming

More than 850 spinal cord injuries result from diving accidents every year. Of those, more than 300 injuries occur at a home pool. A majority of pool-related spinal cord injuries result in paralysis of all four limbs. These injuries often happen when someone misjudges the depth of a pool and dives in, striking the bottom. More than 3,500 people drown each year. For children aged 1 to 4 years old, lack of supervision and lack of physical barriers (locked gate/fence) are implicated in the majority of drowning cases. Alcohol is involved in about half of all fatal drowning accidents.

Here are some swimming safety tips:

- Educate guests about the pool, such as depth markings, lighting and diving board location.
- Never swim alone or consume alcohol or drugs while swimming.
- Set hours for pool use and secure it with fencing to keep people out during inappropriate hours.
- When the pool is in use, always have someone present who is trained in water safety and life-saving techniques.

Running

Running injuries are quite common among both amateurs and

professionals. 65% of runners are injured in an average year, one running injury occurs for about every 100 hours of running, and runners miss about 5-10% of their workouts due to injury. Many running injuries can be reduced through proper conditioning and training, apparel and footwear selection, and awareness of the running environment.

Here are some tips to make your daily runs safer:

- Plan a progressive running program to prevent injuries. A five-minute warm-up followed by stretching exercises is essential before starting a run. Stretch again following the run.
- During hot weather, running should be scheduled in the early morning or evening hours to avoid heat exhaustion. Run in the shade if possible, and avoid direct sun and blacktop. Drink plenty of water to replenish fluid losses.
- Select a running shoe with good shock absorption and construction which will provide stability and cushioning to the foot.
- Do not run at night. Running at night increases the chances of tripping over unseen objects or getting hit by a car. If you run at dusk or dawn wear reflective material.
- Whenever possible, run on a clear, smooth, resilient, even, and reasonably soft surface. Avoid running on hills, which increases stress on the ankle and foot.

Bicycling

About 50,000 bicyclists are injured and 700 are killed every year in accidents. Approximately 60 of these deaths occur in New York and New Jersey. Almost 70% of bicycle fatalities involve head injuries, but only 25% of bicyclists wear helmets. Wearing a bike helmet reduces the



risk of serious head and brain injury by 85%. Children 5 to 14 years of age have the highest injury rate of all bicycle riders.

Many bicycle-related crashes resulting in injury or death are associated with the bicyclist's behavior, including not wearing a bicycle helmet, riding into a street without stopping, swerving into traffic coming from behind, running a stop sign, and riding the wrong way in traffic.

Here are some ways to make yourself safer while biking:

- Wear a properly fitted bicycle helmet. The straps should always be fastened and snug. Cuts, bruises, and even broken bones will heal, but damage to your brain can be permanent. Even a low-speed fall can result in serious head injury. Debilitating injuries can be prevented by wearing a helmet.
- See and be seen. Avoid riding at night if possible.
- Obey traffic laws and signs. Ride on the right-hand side of the street, traveling in the same direction as cars. Never ride against traffic.
- Children less than 10 years old are safer riding on the sidewalk.
- Do not ride a bike at all with a child under the age of 1 year. □

Alan S. Nasar, MD is a board certified, fellowship trained orthopedic surgeon. He has been practicing in Freehold, NJ for the past four years and was recently appointed to the medical staff of Jersey Shore University Medical Center in Neptune, NJ.