



Figure Skating Tip Sheet

Tips to Prevent Injuries, Improve Skating Performance and Prolong Skating Career

Figure skating requires a unique combination of strength, power, endurance, flexibility, balance and grace. A true performer will create a program full of challenging jumps, fast spins and exciting choreography exhibiting agility, grace, and athleticism. In order to perform a dynamic program, sustain yourself through long practice sessions and elongate your skating career, implement the following tips. Make sure you follow these tips with guidance of a licensed health care professional. Physician clearance suggested.

1. Start with the Right Equipment

On-ice you need skates that fit properly and off-ice you will need a good pair of running/cross-training shoes. Make sure you seek the help of a professional to get you in the right footwear. You may need to use padding, taping etc to protect yourself from blisters, corns etc. It is helpful to dress in layers so that you are always comfortable (that's less stress on your body).

2. The Environment

While you cannot control the hardness of the ice surface or the temperature of the ice rink, you can control what you wear to stay warm. Also, you can choose ideal surfaces for your off-ice training, preferably a sprung dance floor. Also, you may not be able to keep away the Zamboni fumes but you can breathe better if you warm up outside or in the lobby portion of the rink.

3. Warm-Up (Before all practices and competitions-Keep it consistent!)

General-Gradually increase heart rate, body temperature and blood flow to the muscles in your body by performing a series of dynamic exercises for 5 minutes. A dynamic warm up includes jogging, skipping, walking lunges, jumping jacks, jumping rope, cariokes, walking hamstring stretch, butt kicks etc.

Sport Specific-Following a general warm-up, spend another 5 minutes doing exercises that will prepare you for figure skating. Start with ankle hops, stationary jumps, ¼ rotational jumps (clockwise and counterclockwise), ½ rotational jumps and so on depending on your skating ability. Work on landing positions (both sides), spiral position (both sides) and any other skill you might be working on that day (such as laybacks, sit spins etc).

4. Cool Down (After all practices and competitions or during long breaks in skating)

Cooling down gradually slows the heart rate after exercise to avoid an abrupt drop in blood pressure. Also, the lactic acid, which is produced during vigorous exercise, is reduced with a proper cool down. Lactic acid causes soreness 24-48 hours following exercise. You will recover quicker so that you will be ready for that next skating session.

5. Stretch (In the morning, before & after practices& competitions, at night during your favorite TV show)

Gently stretch all of the major muscle groups. Hold each stretch for 30 seconds and repeat 2-4 times, careful not to bounce. If you feel pain, you are stretching too hard. Once you have done all of your general stretches, you can practice your splits (3 ways), bridges, Biellman's, etc. Stretching should be done multiple times every day.

6. Aerobics (Long and steady)

Aerobic exercise is any activity which utilizes oxygen to produce energy. To improve your aerobic conditioning, you will need to select an activity (jogging, biking etc) that you can sustain for 20-30 minutes NONSTOP. You want to be breathing harder than normal but you should be able to carry on a conversation. Skating doesn't count since you tend to start and stop so much. This will improve your lung capacity and make your heart stronger and more efficient. Depending on where you are in your training cycle, you will do aerobic activity 1-3x/week.

7. Anaerobics (Think...intervals)

Anaerobic exercise is activity which is done at a very intense level for a shorter duration (30s-2 minutes). You will be breathing heavily during anaerobic exercise. Usually you repeat the exercise several times with a short rest in between. For example, sprint 30s then jog to recover then repeat 4-6 times. Some skaters like to use the slideboard. You can substitute back-to-back program run-throughs as you get closer to your competitive season. Remember, when you are nervous, you require more stamina for your program. Depending on where you are in your training cycle, you will do anaerobic exercise 0-3x/week.

8. Strength Training

Improving strength can enhance your skating while preventing injuries. Many skating skills are performed to one side resulting in muscle imbalances. Many injuries can be prevented by maintaining equal strength from left to right and optimum balance of the muscles from front to back. Strengthen your upper body, lower body and core by performing exercises specific for your age, conditioning experience and skating level 1-3x/week.

9. Improve Balance and Coordination

Incorporating balance exercises into your program will improve the stability in your core, hips and ankles. Balance exercises help prevent injuries by improving proprioception (a fancy word for body awareness).

10. Train Sensibly

Gradually increase your training (both on and off the ice)-sudden increases in training may lead to injuries. Plan ahead for camp situations by getting accustomed to increased training time. Rest when you need it-It is amazing how much visualization helps you retain new information and techniques while allowing your body to rest.

11. Create a master training calendar (Periodization)

Meet with a strength and conditioning coach and design your training program around key competitions.

12. Listen to your body and seek early treatment for aches and pains

It is not normal for your body to hurt. Early recognition, diagnosis and treatment of injuries can minimize time off. Injuries which become chronic (ongoing) take longer to heal and may decrease performance.

13. Practice good nutrition

To perform at an optimum level both physically and mentally, it is important to eat healthy foods. The proper nutrients allow our bodies to heal quicker and train harder. In an effort to maintain a lean physique many skaters dramatically reduce caloric intake. When cutting calories, it becomes more difficult to meet the RDA of vitamins and minerals. It is even more important to make nutrient dense choices when choosing meals. Avoid white flour, white sugar, red meat and trans fats which can increase inflammation and slow healing of our bodies.

14. Stay hydrated

Drinking water is the best way to hydrate and detoxify the body without unwanted calories. Avoid sugar, high fructose corn syrup, caffeine and carbonation.

15. Technique, Technique, Technique

Whether you are on or off the ice, proper technique is important in laying a good foundation for the future. Your skating instructor will help you to optimize practice sessions by teaching good solid technique. An off-ice coach is helpful in teaching you about good body mechanics including proper knee control. Many exercises can be modified by altering your body position to reduce joint stress.

16. Germs...Be Gone!

Hand washing is one of the best ways to avoid spreading and receiving germs. Cover your coughs and stay home if you are sick. If you have wounds, keep covered for your protection and for the protection of others. Lastly, do not share water bottles, lip gloss, hats or other clothing.

17. Get Plenty of Sleep

No matter what your age, it is imperative that you get plenty of sleep. (8-10 hours). Getting proper rest can equate to decreased injuries, improved memory, improved mental health, greater recovery and growth.

18. Reduce Stress

Stress can increase the chances of developing illness and injury by suppressing your immune system. To reduce stress, decrease your activity load, perform relaxation exercises, manage time wisely and keep things in perspective. Practicing visualization of your program at your next competition can help decrease performance anxiety.

19. Posture and Aesthetics

Good posture is the result of proper muscle balance and body awareness. Posture can be improved by stretching and strengthening key muscles and by practicing good technique throughout the day (in your desk, at the computer etc.)

20. Life Balance and Time Management

Start by writing out a list of who or what you value. Rate them in order of value. Does your current lifestyle allow time for all of the important people in your lives and for your favorite activities? Does it reflect your values?

21. Build a Healthy Spirit

Become your authentic self by believing in yourself and your values.

Susan Christensen, LAT, CSCS
susieskate@yahoo.com
(262) 353-6544

