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# **INJURY, ILLNESS & PAIN POLICY**

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Version 1.1



### Version History

Version	Summary of amendments/changes	Published Date
Version 1.0	Document Created	July 2024
Version 1.1	Expanded on coverage of policy	July 2025

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## Contents

1. introduction
2. Key Responsibilities
3. Related Policies and Guidelines
4. Key Definitions
5. Important Considerations
6. Injury, Illness and Pain Policy

## Introduction

In gymnastics, everyone at has a responsibility to ensure safe and positive experiences for all participants. IGA recognises the duty of care to safeguard the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of gymnasts.

IGA clubs and activity providers are obligated to protect participants from undue harm through their actions and decisions, as legally defined by their duty of care. Detailed guidelines can be found in the **IGA Safeguarding document**.

To fulfil this duty, clubs and activity providers must establish and adhere to health and safety policies and procedures, including provisions for appropriate first aid and emergency response.

It's important to note that this document does not replace a club or venue's specific health and safety policy. Its purpose is to set mandatory standards aimed at preventing inappropriate practices related to pain, injury, and illness. For comprehensive information on health and safety requirements in gymnastics clubs and activity settings, please refer to the **IGA Health, Safety & Welfare Policy and Health**.



As gymnastics involves inherent risks of pain, injury, and illness, careful management is essential to mitigate these risks effectively. Managing pain is a personalised process that requires sensitive collaboration among the gymnast, parent/carer, coach, club, and where applicable, broader support networks.

This policy specifies its applicability, scope, and purpose. Should you have any questions or concerns after reviewing this document, please reach out to IGA.

To streamline communication, in this document, the term 'coaches' encompasses IGA's members who serve as coaches, helpers, gymnastics activity instructors, and volunteers. Similarly, 'clubs' refers to registered clubs, encompassing all gymnastics activity providers and venues. These guidelines are applicable to all clubs or venues affiliated with IGA.

Additionally, this document provides information on accessing additional support and emphasizes the prevention of poor practices. For details on the complaints process, please refer to the **IGA Complaints Policy and Procedures**. Clubs and coaches are encouraged to implement effective practices regarding pain, injury, and illness management, as detailed in our **Injury, Illness & Pain Guidance for Good Practice document**.

This policy is informed by guidance from the NHS, Public Health England, UK Coaching, and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Children Act 1989 & 2004, and Equality Act 2010.



## Key Responsibilities

- Clubs, coaches, and support practitioners are obligated to prevent harm and advocate for healthy practices. It is crucial that they adhere to the guidelines outlined in this document during gymnastics activities, ensuring the implementation of safe practices concerning pain, injury, and illness.
- Additional resources for parents/carers and gymnasts on safe practices for managing pain, injury, and illness can be accessed in the 'What do I need to know' materials. It is imperative that gymnasts and/or their parents/carers promptly report any instances of pain, injury, or illness to clubs and coaches.
- Volunteers and assistant staff must also be trained in identifying and reporting signs of injury, illness, or distress, even if not delivering sessions independently.
- Clubs must have a named lead (e.g. head coach or welfare officer) responsible for monitoring implementation of this policy.

## Related Policies and Guidelines

- *Coaches Code of conduct: Coaching Procedures*
- *IGA Safeguarding Policy*
- *Code of Conduct for Registered Clubs*
- *IGA's Health, Safety and Welfare Policy*
- *Incident Reporting Procedures*





## Key Definitions

- **Gymnastics:** This term encompasses all forms of gymnastics activities, sessions, training, and competitions, including all disciplines recognised by IGA.
- **Pain:** Defined as an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience linked to actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage.
- **Injury:** Refers to tissue damage or disturbance of normal physical function resulting from sudden or repetitive transfer of kinetic energy.
- **Illness:** Any complaint or disorder experienced by a gymnast, not arising from injury, encompassing health-related issues affecting physical (e.g., influenza), mental (e.g., depression), or social well-being, or loss of essential elements (air, water, warmth).
- **Physical health:** Refers to the normal functioning of the body.
- **Emotional health:** The capacity to manage both positive and negative emotions effectively.
- **Mental health:** Describes the way individuals think, feel, and behave.
- **Gaslighting:** The act of manipulating someone to doubt their own perception of reality.
- **Return to Play:** The phased process by which an athlete resumes full activity following injury or illness, based on medical guidance.
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Changes made to accommodate injury, illness, or disability, under the Equality Act 2010.



## Important Considerations

- Emotional and mental well-being are as important as physical health.
- Pain is always a subjective experience influenced by various factors such as emotions, developmental aspects, cultural background, current situation, and past experiences, and should always be treated with respect.
- There are various ways individuals may express pain along with verbal descriptions.
- It is important to adhere to NHS guidelines when managing illness.
- Mention mental health crises (e.g. anxiety attacks) as legitimate forms of illness requiring rest, support, or referral.
- Concussion-specific guidance:

"All suspected head injuries must follow the principle 'If in doubt, sit them out' in line with NHS and UK Coaching protocols."

## Injury, Illness and Pain Policy

Please note, for any head injuries or suspected head injuries, the principle of 'if in doubt, sit them out' should be applied.

- If a gymnast, parent/carer, or coach, in accordance with their Duty of Care, believes or has reason to believe that the gymnast is unable to fully or partially participate in gymnastics (such as performing specific skills) due to pain, injury, or illness, this must be respected and addressed by all parties involved.
- Discriminatory actions, threats, coercion, or any behaviors that could be interpreted as gaslighting, abuse of power imbalance, or emotional abuse regarding a gymnast's pain, injury, or illness are strictly prohibited under any circumstances.
- Concussion and Head Injuries - In the event of a suspected or confirmed concussion, the gymnast must be immediately removed from training or competition. This aligns with national guidance from NHS England and Sport England: "If in doubt, sit them out." Gymnasts who have sustained a concussion must follow a medically guided, phased return-to-play protocol. For children and young people under 18, this should include a minimum 14-day rest period from full contact training. A return to full activity must not occur without written clearance from a qualified healthcare professional.



- Clubs must retain accident and illness records for at least 3 years, or until the gymnast turns 21 if they were under 18 at the time of the incident.
- For serious injuries or extended illness (e.g. fractures, surgeries, mental health), return to training should only proceed with written confirmation from a qualified medical professional (GP, physiotherapist, etc.)
- For ongoing conditions, clubs may use gymnast self-report tools (e.g. pain logs or check-ins) to better tailor training volume and identify risks early.
- If a gymnast reports pain, illness, or injury and is pressured to continue against their will or medical advice, this may constitute emotional abuse. These concerns must be escalated to the club welfare officer or IGA.
- Return to Play/Training - For any serious injury, illness, surgery, or extended absence, gymnasts must not return to full training or competition without appropriate medical guidance. In such cases, IGA recommends that clubs request written clearance from a GP, physiotherapist, or other licensed medical professional. A phased reintroduction to activity should be developed collaboratively with the gymnast, their parent/guardian, and the club coaching team.
- Mental Health and Wellbeing - Mental health concerns—such as anxiety, panic attacks, eating disorders, or emotional exhaustion—must be treated with the same seriousness as physical injuries. If a gymnast is visibly distressed or expresses mental health difficulties, they should be removed from training and supported appropriately. Clubs should consider signposting to GP services or mental health support, and ensure any such concerns are raised with the Welfare Officer.
- Pain Logs and Check-Ins - For gymnasts experiencing persistent pain or long-term conditions, clubs are encouraged to use optional pain monitoring tools, such as weekly gymnast check-ins or pain diaries. These tools help coaches identify early signs of worsening issues and make necessary training adjustments in collaboration with the gymnast and their family.





- In cases of serious injury, illness, or near-miss events, clubs should conduct a short debrief involving staff and the gymnast's parent/guardian (where appropriate). This should cover:
  1. How the incident occurred
  2. What actions were taken
  3. Any changes to training, environment, or supervision required
- Clubs must regularly review the implementation of this policy as part of their annual safeguarding and health audit. IGA recommends clubs retain a record of any incidents involving injury, illness, or distress to evaluate patterns or areas for improvement. The policy itself should be reviewed annually or after any serious incident.
- For gymnasts aged 16 and over, clubs should involve them directly in decisions relating to injury or illness management, provided this is appropriate and safe to do so. Their views should be taken seriously in all communications, especially when balancing training and recovery needs.
- Coaches must consider the needs of gymnasts with disabilities or chronic conditions and provide reasonable adjustments in line with the Equality Act 2010. This may include adapted rest protocols, reduced-impact training, or additional medical liaison.

### Roles & Communication Summary Table

Role	Responsibility
Gymnast	Report pain/injury honestly
Coach	Pause session, assess, adapt activity
Parent/Carer	Support medical guidance, communicate updates
Welfare Officer	Oversee implementation, escalate safeguarding issues
Club	Maintain records, ensure all staff understand protocol



- Before the gymnastics activity begins, the gymnast or parent/carer must inform the club or coach if the gymnast is experiencing pain, injury, or illness that they believe or have been advised will affect their participation. Clubs and coaches are required to follow the steps outlined below:

**Step 1:**

All information must be treated with respect and handled carefully.

**Step 2:**

Any decision regarding a gymnast's participation in gymnastics despite pain, injury, or illness should:

- a. Take into account the gymnast's short and long-term physical, emotional, and/or mental well-being.
- b. Prioritise the gymnast's best interests in the decision-making process.
- c. Involve collaboration between the gymnast, coach, parent/carer (for individuals under 16 or adults at risk), and, when appropriate, medical professionals and other support personnel.
- d. Aim to mitigate any present or potential risks to the gymnast's physical, emotional, or mental health.

**Step 3:**

In collaboration with the gymnast, any necessary adaptations or reasonable adjustments must be implemented in the gymnastics environment or activity to accommodate the reported or diagnosed health issue, condition, or concern. These adaptations could include modifying activities to avoid using the injured or painful body part while minimising risks to other areas, removing activities that cause mental or emotional distress, or considering alternatives to ensure safe participation.

**Step 4:**

Throughout gymnastics sessions, consistently monitor the gymnast's condition regarding their pain, injury, or illness to continuously mitigate any risks to their physical, emotional, or mental well-being.

During gymnastics, if a gymnast discloses experiencing pain, injury, or illness, or if a club or coach suspects a gymnast is affected by any pain, injury, or illness, clubs and coaches must adhere to the following steps:

**Step 1:**

If there are any concerns regarding pain, injury, or illness that require immediate medical attention, discontinue the activity and follow the emergency procedures of your club, venue, or event.

**Step 2:**

If emergency procedures are unnecessary, pause the activity as soon as possible and discuss the pain, injury, or illness complaint or concern with the gymnast.



### **Step 3:**

Any decision regarding a gymnast's participation in gymnastics due to pain, injury, or illness must:

- a.** Take into account the gymnast's short and long-term physical, emotional, and/or mental health.
- b.** Prioritise the gymnast's best interests in the decision-making process.
- c.** Mitigate any present or potential risks to the gymnast's physical, emotional, or mental well-being.
- d.** Involve a collaborative decision-making process among the gymnast, coach, and, where appropriate, medical practitioners and broader support team.
- e.** Include informing the parent/carer (for individuals under 16 or at risk) at the earliest available opportunity of any impact on the gymnast's participation in gymnastics or their daily life.

For competitions or events, adherence to the regulations outlined in the respective competition handbook regarding a gymnast's pain, injury, or illness is required. In instances where a medical officer is appointed, decisions concerning a gymnast's health status and ability to compete will be made by the medical officer or the competition organiser based on the medical officer's recommendation, and this decision is final.

The earliest available opportunity for notifying the parent/carer may vary based on circumstances, considering the severity of the pain, injury, or illness, or the level of participation in the activity. While immediate notification might not always be necessary, clubs should have established procedures, such as accident forms, to ensure timely communication with parents/carers regarding any incidents of pain, injury, or illness.



**Step 4:**

Together with the gymnast, necessary adaptations or reasonable adjustments must be implemented in the gymnastics environment or activities to address the reported or diagnosed health issue. These adaptations may involve modifying activities to avoid using the injured or painful body part while minimising risks to other areas of the body, eliminating activities that cause mental or emotional distress, or preventing participation altogether if deemed necessary.

**Step 5:**

If the gymnast chooses to remain active in gymnastics or stays within the gymnastics environment, it is essential to regularly communicate with them regarding their pain, injury, or illness. This ongoing dialogue helps to continuously mitigate any risks or potential risks to the gymnast's physical, emotional, or mental well-being.

**Step 6:**

All accidents and first aid treatments, regardless of their severity, must be documented thoroughly using an accident report form. For further details, please refer to the IGA Incident Reporting and Procedures guidelines.

If the club and coach have concerns about the gymnast's pain, injury, or illness, they should recommend seeking medical advice from qualified practitioners such as GPs, Sports Doctors, or Physiotherapists.

For ongoing pain, injury, or illness concerns, clubs and coaches must maintain collaboration with the gymnast and parents/carers (for those under 16 or at risk), adapting gymnastics activities to minimise further risks to the gymnast's physical, emotional, or mental health.



When a gymnast returns to full or partial training after an absence due to pain, injury, or illness, clubs and coaches must ensure a gradual and safe progression through gymnastics activities. Continuous collaboration with the gymnast, parents/carers (for minors or those at risk), and potentially the wider support team is essential. It is important to adapt gymnastics practices in accordance with medical or sports science advice from qualified practitioners (e.g., strength and conditioning experts, psychologists) to mitigate any risks to the gymnast's physical, emotional, or mental health.