

# First national study to examine rock climbing-related injuries

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In the past decade the popularity of rock climbing has dramatically increased. It has been estimated that rock climbing is now enjoyed by more than 9 million people in the U.S. each year. A new study by researchers at the Center for Injury Research and Policy of the Research Institute at the Nationwide Children's Hospital found that as the popularity of the sport has escalated, so have the number of injuries. Study findings revealed a 63 percent increase in the number of patients that were treated in U.S. emergency departments for rock climbing-related injuries between 1990 and 2007.

The study, published in the online issue of the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#), found that over 40,000 patients were treated in U.S. emergency departments for rock climbing-related injuries between 1990 and 2007. The most common types of rock climbing-related injuries were fractures (29 percent) and sprains and strains (29 percent). Lower extremities were the most common region of the body to be injured (46 percent) while the ankle was the most common individual body part to be injured (19 percent). Climbers in the study ranged in age from 2 to 74 years, with an average age of 26 years. Climbers 20-39 years old accounted for the majority of the injuries (56 percent) while climbers 19 years and younger accounted for 30 percent. Climbers 40 years and older accounted for the remaining 14 percent. The study also found that women accounted for more than 28 percent of the injuries, a higher proportion than found in previous rock climbing studies.

Falls were the primary mechanism for [injury](#) with over three-quarters of

the injuries occurring as the result of a fall. The severity of fall-related injuries correlated with the height of the fall. Patients who were injured after falling from a height over 20 feet were 10 times more likely to be hospitalized than patients who were injured falling from 20 feet or lower.

"We found that the climbers who fell from heights higher than 20 feet accounted for 70 percent of the patients there were hospitalized for a rock climbing-related injury," explained study author Lara McKenzie, PhD, principal investigator at the Center for Injury Research and Policy at Nationwide Children's Hospital and faculty member of The Ohio State University College of Medicine. "This trend, combined with the fact that rock climbers have a higher hospitalization rate than other sports and recreational injuries, demonstrates the need to increase injury prevention efforts for climbers."

Source: Nationwide Children's Hospital ([news](#) : [web](#))

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