

Injuries that can keep Olympians from the gold

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U.S. gymnast Simone Biles vowed to continue her quest for Olympic gold after injuring her calf in a qualifying round at the Paris games.

Meanwhile, a thigh injury forced French soccer captain Wendie Renard out of competition in a loss to Canada.

And the L.A. Clippers' Kawhi Leonard was forced to sit out the games entirely due to inflammation in his right knee, which was injured twice before.

While Olympic athletes can make their sports look effortless, constant overuse of muscles and tendons can lead to big-time injuries that do more than cost them a medal, according to an orthopedic expert from Baylor College of Medicine. And the risks run through all sports—from gymnastics and distance running to swimming.

Biles' comeback after withdrawing from the 2020 Tokyo games has been a major focus of U.S. fans during the 2024 games. She's competing in four events—vault, floor, beam and all-around.

"Gymnasts are subjected to tremendous physical demands, and the repetitive nature of their trainings and performances increase the risk of injuries throughout the body," said Dr. Jet Liu, an assistant professor of orthopedic surgery at Baylor in Houston, who detailed the most common injuries in popular Olympic sports.

For gymnasts, knee sprains, strains and torn ACL ligaments can result from high-impact jumps, flips and dismounts, he said. Ankle injuries are a common consequence of landings and dismounts, while wrist strains, fractures and pains often result from weight-bearing handstands and cartwheels.

Liu said gymnasts might also experience rotator cuff injuries from high-impact landings and repetitive overhead movements from swinging on the bars.

"Proper technique, conditioning and preventive measures are essential to minimize these risks and ensure the longevity of their careers," he said.

Basketball is a high-impact sport in which ankle and foot injuries are common, Liu said. When ligaments supporting the ankle stretch too much or tear, typically during sudden shifts or bad landings, sprains result.

Jumping and quick sprints can lead to ruptured Achilles tendons. Knee injuries—including a ruptured ACL or torn miniscus—often require surgery. Overuse and repetitive stress from jumping can lead to a form of tendonitis often called jumper's knee. Shoulder dislocations are rare but a very real risk.

"For these on-court collisions when you're running high speed down the court, going through a pick or going around other players, you can experience shoulder injuries," Liu said.

Track and field athletes have a different set of risks. Runners often suffer strained hamstrings from fast starts and stops, as well as shin splints. Stress fractures may result from extreme overuse, Liu added.

Hip flexor strains, jumper's knee and shoulder or elbow strains are also common, depending on an athlete's event.

Even water sports, which may seem to cushion the body with buoyancy, come with risks to muscles and extremities. Swimmer's shoulder refers to any strain of the rotator cuff, labrum or surrounding muscles in the shoulder.

Repetitive overhead strokes often lead to shoulder impingement syndrome, Liu said. That's when an inflamed tendon gets squeezed, causing pain, limited motion and, if untreated, chronic [shoulder](#) issues.

Lower back strain, overuse injuries and [knee injuries](#) are common among swimmers as well.

"All injuries can significantly impact athletes' overall condition in their sport," Liu said. "It is crucial for athletes to engage in appropriate rehabilitation to maintain peak performance."

More information: There's more about common Olympic sports injuries at [East Alabama Health](#).

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