

Cruis'n for a Bruisin'

Excerpted from "The Billings Gazette," June 4, 2003, "Orthopedic Corner: Skateboarding Safer than Basketball," by Dr. Michael Yorgason.

The growth of skateboarding continues to increase at an exponential rate. According to data from the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association, 11.6 million people between the ages of 6 and 18 years

old were skateboarding in the year 2000; this number has grown 48.7 percent from 1999. Researchers further expect there to be 15 million skateboarders by 2005.

Falling from as little as 2 feet can cause a traumatic brain injury. This means that skateboarders, skaters and those who ride scooters are at risk. Wearing the recommended safety gear and proper helmet

is important. Wearing a helmet could prevent 85 percent of those injuries.

The best research which quantifies skateboarding risks comes from the Journal of Trauma, October 02, and is written by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. They determined the number of skateboarding injuries per active skateboarder and compared those numbers to in-line skating

and basketball. Skateboarding had an injury rate of 8.9 per 1,000 participants. In-line skating was 3.9 per 1,000 and basketball produced 21.2 ER-treated injuries per 1,000 players. Statistically, skateboarding is safer than playing basketball.

Most injuries were in boys ages 10 to 14 years — not surprising, as that illustrates the typical skateboarder. Thirty-three percent of the injuries happened during the first week of skateboarding. Wrist, arm or ankle fractures account for 50 percent of injuries.

Skateboarders rarely use protective equipment such as helmets and wrist guards. If we compare that to in-line skaters, however, studies suggest these two protective devices would decrease the rate of injury and perhaps the severity (a sprain vs. fracture).

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Too often this is the scene -- people participating in unprotected skating. We wanted to get a good action shot with someone in full pads and gear getting some serious air ... unfortunately the best laid plans sometimes go awry. Skateboarders cite many of the same arguments against Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) as some motorcyclists -- it's restrictive, hot, reduces field of vision, gives them "helmet hair" etc., but those who've spent an afternoon in the ER getting gravel dug out of their head and knees would probably beg to differ. Dr. Michael Yorgason makes the point that, with limited or no protective equipment, skateboarders experience fewer injuries on average than basketball players, but goes on to make the point that most skateboarding accidents could be prevented if helmets and pads were worn. Set a good example, wear your PPE.

Prevention Tips

- Always wear protective gear:
 - Wear a helmet that meets or exceeds the safety standards developed by SNELL, ANSI and/or the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM), elbow, wrist and kneepads.
 - Wrist guards and other protective gear can prevent broken bones and other roller sports-related injuries.
 - Skateboard helmets are different from bicycle helmets and should be purchased separately to provide adequate protection.
 - When skateboarding, wear closed, slip-resistant shoes and specially designed padding.
- Stay on a surface that is smooth and free of debris.
- Don't go at night.
- Stay off the streets.
- Don't hitch a ride from bicycles, cars or anything else.
- Be aware of those around you.
- Only one person should be on a skateboard.
- Check to make sure your skateboard is not damaged before each ride.
- Select a skateboard suitable for your level.
- Children under age 5 shouldn't use a skateboard.
- Carefully practice tricks in designated skateboarding areas.
- When falling is inevitable, learning how to fall safely can help reduce the risk of severe injuries. ★

Photo by: Sgt. Ben Blaker