

## Stay healthy for rowing

Rowing isn't just about what you do on the water. Lots of things can affect how well you perform. The advice in this chapter will help you stay healthy so that you can stay rowing!

In this chapter there is information and advice on:

- Infections you can catch at the river
- Risks of cold weather
- Risks of hot weather and too much sun
- Dealing with blisters
- Asthma and allergies
- Dehydration
- Healthy eating
- What to do if you are ill or injured

## Stay clean!

River water is dirty. The landing stages are even dirtier. A number of water-borne diseases, such as tummy bugs and leptospirosis, can be quite serious so you need to protect yourself and know when to seek help if you become ill.

Leptospirosis (also called Weil's Disease in serious cases) is a bacterial infection transmitted through contact with contaminated urine from animals such as rats and cattle. Although we don't often see rats at the riverside they are there.

The condition is RARE – 40 cases a year in England and Wales – but as a rower you are at higher risk than people who don't do watersports. If you have a cut or a blister that comes into contact with infected rat urine you may contract the disease.

How to prevent infection:

- Cover cuts and burst blisters with a waterproof dressing
- Wash your hands thoroughly after rowing and before you eat
- Take a shower after being on the water
- If you cut yourself or a blister bursts during an outing ask your coach for a dressing – there are several First Aid kits in the boat house

In 90% of cases leptospirosis is like having mild flu with:

- Fever
- Chills
- Headache
- Loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting
- Muscle pain (especially in the lower back and calves)
- Conjunctivitis (sore, red eyes)
- Cough
- A rash

If you have these symptoms and you suspect leptospirosis you should see your GP – a blood test can check if you have the infection and you will be prescribed antibiotics.

In very rare cases leptospirosis gets worse and become Weil's disease. Symptoms such as swollen ankles and feet, chest pain and violent headaches should be taken seriously – go to hospital.

*Thankfully, the vast majority of people who contract leptospirosis make a full recovery so don't worry too much about this infection – just be aware that it is around and take care to prevent getting it in the first place!*

## **Respect the weather!**

### **Cold weather**

Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature falls below 35°C. It can be extremely dangerous which is why we take it seriously.

When air temperatures fall to 10°C or below, your coaches will start nagging you to wrap up. Cool days can become very cold days if it is raining or windy.

Rowers are at risk if they:

- Fall into the river
- Do not wear suitable clothing for the conditions
- Row when it's raining or windy
- Get very tired during an outing
- Are rowing in cold conditions while ill (e.g. with a cold)
- Have not eaten properly before an outing
- Are very thin or small
- Are not moving around much (e.g. coxswains)
- Are dehydrated

Young people are also at risk because they may not 'feel' the cold and therefore may not see the need to take precautions to stay safe.

Wet clothing is a hazard. You lose body heat 25 times faster when you are wet or are in the river, than you do when you are dry. ALWAYS have spare kit in your bag. Consider bringing a dry bag in the boat so that layers you take off don't get wet.

### **Preventing hypothermia**

It is extremely important to dress for the conditions.

In cold weather, in addition to your all-in-one, you must wear:

- long sleeves
- leggings (two pairs in really cold weather)
- plenty of thin layers (e.g. skins)
- a waterproof top (splash top)

- long socks (or even two pairs)
- a warm hat
- consider investing in a pair of pogies (special rowing gloves)
- coxswains *must* wear waterproof trousers

If you fall in the river during the winter and only your head is above water, a warm hat helps to stop body heat escaping and buys you valuable seconds before you are rescued or can swim to the bank.

**IMPORTANT:** If you attend a river session inadequately clothed for the conditions (including hat) you will not be allowed onto the water. Keep plenty of kit in your kit bag and **ALWAYS** bring your warm hat.

## **Warm / hot weather**

There are numerous hazards associated with exercising in hot weather including sunburn, heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

You can reduce your risk by:

- Using suncream to prevent sunburn
- Wearing a hat / visor to reduce glare from the sun (hats are compulsory in the summer)
- Wearing sun glasses to protect your eyes from the sun and the glare off the water
- Wearing lightweight clothing (all-in-one or athletics vest and shorts)
- Taking frequent sips of water

During hot weather your coaches may alter the outing to do light technical work instead of heavy mileage session and will try to find shady spots where you can rest during the outing.

**IMPORTANT:** If you attend a river session on a hot or sunny day without your Crew Room hat or visor, or you do not have a drink of water with you, you will not be allowed onto the water. Keep plenty of kit in your kit bag and **ALWAYS** bring your hat or visor and a drink.

## **Blisters**

Blisters are an occupational hazard of being a rower. Many rowers are tempted to wear gloves but I do not recommend them as you cannot manipulate the blade handle properly with them and your hands will remain soft – you need to harden them up!

You can reduce blistering by relaxing your grip on the blade handle – this will also improve your rowing stroke. Keep loose hands!

If your blisters have burst or are bleeding you need to keep them clean and covered with a waterproof dressing (keep some in your kit bag). If your hands are very sore you can cover them with a plaster or dressing and then wrap surgical tape around your hands, and then a layer of waterproof tape (electrical or thin gaffer tape is good for this).

Rubbing an antiseptic cream such as Sudocrem into your hands last thing at night may help your hands heal. Some rowers swear by surgical spirit but this is a hard core (painful) option. Eventually your hands will harden up!

For more advice on blister care visit: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Blisters/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

## Asthma

Many top rowers have asthma and there is no reason why it should stop you rowing – *as long as it is well controlled.*

It is *your* responsibility to make sure that you are taking your preventer asthma medication, and that you have your emergency inhaler with you at all times. We want you to keep rowing so please take your asthma seriously and under control!

If you need your reliever inhaler (e.g. the blue Ventolin inhaler) three or more times a week to control symptoms it is a sign that your asthma may not be under control. Talk to your asthma nurse or GP.

Every year we have to deal with cases of asthma – sometimes quite severe. This can be frightening for you, for your crew and for the people who look after you. Please do your bit by taking your asthma seriously and looking after yourself.

## Allergies

Hayfever and allergic rhinitis (the snuffles) can make rowing very unpleasant – we are outdoors, you are going to be exposed to pollen, spores, traffic etc. Make sure you take your medication well before pollen counts go sky high!

## Keep hydrated

Always bring a *drink of water* with you in the boat. We do not recommend isotonic sports drinks, energy drinks or any other sugary drink. There is a school rule banning the consumption or the possession of all carbonated drinks. This will be strictly enforced at the boat house and on the river.

### Beat the bugs

Keep your bottles clean to avoid catching a tummy bug. Wash your bottle thoroughly after EVERY outing (DON'T leave it in the boat 'for next time'). Avoid getting river water in contact with the spout of your bottle. Sterilize drinks bottle once a week (baby bottle sterilizing tablets are ideal for this).

Sugar is really bad for your teeth – especially when it is sipped frequently (i.e. increases the time your teeth are in contact with sugar). Dental caries in teenagers is on the increase primarily because of sugary drinks.

Sugar is very high in calories and offers no other nutritional benefits (like vitamins, minerals). Despite what you see on the adverts you are very unlikely to EVER do a session at RGS

Worcester that burns off the amount of calories in a 500ml bottle of Lucozade or similar 'energy drink'. You literally cannot do that amount of exercise in the rowing sessions you do as an under 18 rower.

## Eat well

Good nutrition is as important as training well. If you eat junk, your rowing will suffer (and so will everything else!). You need to eat a healthy, varied diet. There are more nutrition details in the Eat Like a Champion booklet available from Mrs Sullivan. Here are some important points:

- ALWAYS eat breakfast. Rowers who do not eat breakfast will not be able to row well (even if your outing is later in the day) and will be letting their crew mates down.
- Don't skip meals – ideally you should be eating breakfast, lunch and dinner with two healthy snacks in between, and if you are really hungry a healthy snack eg cup of cocoa and banana, or a bowl of cereal, in the evening.
- Eat a small amount of protein at every meal – your body can use protein more efficiently if you eat it little and often rather than at one meal.
- Bring a snack to every training session to eat within 30 minutes of finishing exercise as that's when your body needs some protein and carbs to help repairs your muscles.
- Eat a meal within 90 minutes of finishing your training session.

### Healthy snacks for rowers

These snacks contain a combination of protein and carbohydrates to help you recover after training:

- Carton of milk, milkshake or a smoothie (made with milk or yoghurt) – look out for cartons that don't need to be kept in the fridge (ideal for kit bags)
- Bowl of cereal with milk
- 1 cereal bar + a yogurt
- 1 large pot of rice pudding
- 1 bread roll with meat or cheese filling + a banana
- 2 crumpets or a bagel spread with cream cheese or peanut butter + a glass of milk

## What to do if you are ill or injured?

ALWAYS tell your coach BEFORE the start of the session if you are not feeling well or something hurts (i.e. you are injured). We expect everyone who attends rowing to be fit and well enough to do *all* of the training. We will not be impressed with people who tell us half way through an outing: "I can't do much because my tummy hurts."

**COLDS:** Do not train if you have a cold. We don't want your germs. Your fellow rowers don't want your germs. You could do yourself more harm by soldiering on when you're ill. Tell your coach (in advance) that you're ill. Go home. Get better.

**INJURIES:** Listen to your body. If something hurts (and it's not just the normal muscle ache you get from working hard) then it needs sorting. Tell your coach if something hurts while you are rowing. It is important to do this as injuries are much easier to sort out if treatment starts early.

## **Coming back from illness / injury**

If you have had a cold or tummy bug you may need to ease back into training. Don't expect to resume your normal level of training straight away as your body needs time to build up strength again. It can take a week or two to get your fitness back but don't stress over it you will soon bounce back!

Any rower who has been injured will require a tailored programme of rehab to get back to full fitness. We will work closely with your physio (or other specialist) to make sure you are doing the correct exercises to get you back into rowing. Be patient. Sometimes it can take several weeks / months for your body to recover.

**And finally**, if you have any queries about your health and rowing speak to your coach, the School Nurse or your parents.