

THE VALUE OF JUMPING ROPE BRINGING BACK AN OLD STAPLE



Recently we have rediscovered the value of performing a simple (but not easy) exercise you probably haven't attempted since you were in grade school. It used to be a gym class staple, and has been a part of training for combat sports forever. I have to give a nod to my colleague Jim McKee for bringing this simple method of power development back to the forefront, especially in our youth programs. The exercise I'm talking about is jumping rope. It's not just for the playground anymore...

The first group I implemented this with, I was met with an unexpected blank stare. The silence was so awkward, I thought they might not have heard me, so I repeated myself. "We are going to jump rope for one minute." After another awkward pause, one of the kids sheepishly asked...

"Like, just jump rope? Is it a trick rope or something? What's the catch?"

"No funny business here, I just want you to jump rope for one minute."

The 60 seconds that followed consisted of about 15 seconds of actual jumping rope and 45 seconds of shin whipping, restarts, and negative self-talk. It turns out, this simple skill is not so easy. Jumping rope is a skill that requires practice to perform effectively, and it is something we see today's youth struggling with in a major way. As I mentioned before, it used to be a gym class staple. However in today's schools, gym class is no longer a staple, so we see what used to be standard athletic skills fade away and general athletic development decline.

THE BENEFITS OF JUMPING ROPE

Posture, alignment - Your body will learn how to center over your feet, helping to improve postural efficiency.

Tempo, rhythm, timing - Especially for youth athletes, developing these attributes helps in all other athletic pursuits.

Proprioception, body awareness - Good for general athletic development. Get to know where your body is in space.

Foot, ankle, and shin strength - The musculature of the feet and lower leg has gotten progressively weaker as shoes add more and more padding. Our feet are rarely forced to work, so the intrinsic muscles and tissues don't develop. Weak feet and shins cause us to lose power as we accelerate because the ankle joint can't remain rigid and force generated by the hips and legs aren't transferred through to the ground.

Tissue elasticity - the repeated bouncing helps the lower leg to learn to be more elastic, storing energy and releasing it more effectively. Think of this bounce as "tuning the springs" to be tighter and more responsive. This leads to more explosive ability and movement

economy.

Cardiovascular development - This is a full body exercise, capable of producing near maximum heart rates because of the number of muscles it takes to produce the movement. In fact, jumping rope is lower impact, uses more muscles, and even burns more calories than jogging over an equal amount of time.

LOWER LEG STRENGTH IN HOCKEY

Skating relies on a very different set of rules than do other sports played on a field or court. Ground contact time is relatively long (compared to a sprinter or running back) for each stride, and the ankle is bound up and often well supported in a boot. This would seem to limit the importance of shin and foot strength, but think of it this way. What are we looking for in a good start on the ice? Small marks on the ice for the first two or three strides, and lots of vertical distance between them. Overall we want the force we generate with our powerful hips (hockey butts) and legs to transfer directly through our skates and into the ice to propel us forward. Think, what joint is most likely to be the weak link in the chain of hip/leg/ankle? Naturally, it is the ankle which is relatively small, and does not get as much attention compared to the others. Weak shins or ankles can cause a "leak" in energy generated by the hips and legs, and lead to a loss of power when accelerating on the ice. If the foot is not strong enough to be stable and transfer the force generated by the hips and legs, the heel will drop under the pressure causing you to lose the spring in your start and make a much longer mark on the ice. In a good start with strong feet and ankles, the springs remain tight and the marks are short because you are not allowing the heels to drop down, placing more blade on the ice and leaking power in your start.

Jumping rope is a big "bang for your buck" activity that can improve explosiveness, coordination, and conditioning all for about \$10 from your local sporting goods store. Not only is a jump rope an inexpensive training tool, it is also very portable, able to be thrown in even the most over-stuffed suitcase or hockey bag. The variations are endless, so find some that work for you (not surprisingly, we are looking to get people good enough to do several patterns on one leg) and get practicing. The increased strength, elasticity, and rhythm will help your athleticism and make you more dynamic on the ice, court, or pitch. To learn more about how to integrate the jump rope into your program, contact Brian at bsipotz@advantagestrength.com.

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