

Nonfiction Reading

Trampolines

What's more fun than standing still? Jumping up and down on a springy piece of fabric! This activity is known as trampolining and it's sweeping the nation.

The idea of trampolining is ancient. Eskimos have been tossing each other in the air using walrus skin for thousands of years. Firemen began using a life net to catch people jumping from buildings in 1887. And in the early 1900s, circus performers began bouncing off of netting to amuse audiences. These weren't the same as today's trampolines, but they show that the idea has been bouncing around for a long time.

A tumbler named George Nissan and his coach Larry Griswold made the first modern trampoline in 1936. They got the idea by watching trapeze artists bouncing off of a tight net at the circus. The two men experimented with different fabrics and designs. They found a winner when they stretched a piece of canvas across a steel frame and held it in place with springs. They named their device after the Spanish word *trampolín*, which means diving board.

At first Nissan and Griswold used their device to train tumblers. The piece of training equipment was a lot of fun. They realized that everyone could enjoy their trampoline, not just tumblers. The men wanted to share their idea with the whole world. In 1942 they began making trampolines to sell to the public.

Trampolines may be fun, but they can also be dangerous. Experts estimate that more than 100,000 people hurt themselves while using one each year. Clubs and gyms use large safety nets and rubber padding to make it safer. Most trampoline injuries happen at home. Since trampolines are more affordable than ever, injuries are even more common.

These injuries happen for many reasons. People may bounce too high and land off of the trampoline or onto the springs. From the peak of the bounce, this can be a fall of 13 feet or more.

Ouch. Injuries also happen when many people are jumping at the same time. Jumpers may collide and cause one another to land in strange ways.

Lots of people have broken bones in this way. Perhaps the worst injuries happen when untrained people try to do flips. Landing on your neck or head can paralyze or even kill you.

But don't let all that bad news keep you down. There are many things that you can do to practice safe trampolining. You can cover the springs with special pads so that people's limbs are less likely to get stuck in them. You can surround your trampoline with a net so that people don't fall off of it. You can limit bouncers to one at a time. This will prevent collision injuries. Perhaps most importantly, you should never flip on a trampoline without professional guidance. You are much less likely to get hurt on a trampoline if you do these things.

Trampolines have been around for a while now. They have brought a lot of joy to many people. There is no feeling quite like soaring up in the air and then free-falling. Trampolines can also be a good source of exercise and activity. They can help people improve their balance and aerial moves. But they can also be deadly. Be sure that you are practicing safety while having a good time. Happy bouncing!