

# Beginning Plyometrics

I remember one time after a training session with a group of middle school soccer players I mentioned that next session we would be beginning plyometrics. A group of parents approached me after the session and expressed their concern. “Isn’t that dangerous?” “Can’t they get injured doing that?” One of the parents, who was a doctor, was in the middle of telling the other parents how plyometrics can damage the growth plates in young athletes when I asked his “medical opinion”. “Do you think it would be safe for them to jump rope, skip, hop on one foot or do bunny hops down the field instead?” I asked. His response was, “Sure, all kids can do that.”

The point of this story is that plyometrics is not only jumping off of boxes wearing weighted vests. The theory behind plyometrics is that a quick stretch of a muscle followed by a rapid contraction results in a greater muscular contraction. Therefore, jumping rope or even playing hopscotch can be considered plyometrics. We don’t need to be afraid of this type of exercise.

When beginning a plyometric program, the first step is to teach proper landing technique. First, have the players get into a half-squat position. Now have the players jump into the air and land in the half-squat position. The landing should be soft and quiet. Have the athletes land as quietly as possible, absorbing the shock of landing over the ankle joint, the knee joint, and the hip joint. This quiet landing will be the foundation of all future plyometric training. When this landing is mastered try hopping in place 20 times, landing softly and quietly. Now hop forward for 10 hops and backward for 10 hops. Finally hop side to side over a line on the field for 30 seconds. Always focus on soft and quiet landings. There, you have now completed your first plyometric workout! No injuries, no damaged growth plates, no problems. Over the next 4 weeks, progress to 2 sets through, and 3 sets through as tolerated. By implementing plyometric training in this fashion, you can safely and effectively begin plyometric training at any age.