



Mind the Strain and Avoid the Break

We are constantly bombarded with reminders of the importance of maintenance. Whether it's our dentist that is urging us to floss more frequently or our mechanic reminding us to check the air pressure in our tires, we are encouraged daily to put a maintenance plan in place. Taking care of our gymnastics equipment is no different. Very rarely will equipment just break. There are lots of warning signs and indicators that a problem is just around the corner.

Areas of high use wear out faster. Based on our driving habits, the tires on our cars have uneven wear. Hence we should learn to rotate them to improve performance and increase longevity. The same principal applies to some of the equipment in the gym. Most of us can easily determine which rail on the uneven bars wears out faster. Usually one set of bars in the gym is more popular based on location, spacing, or landing space. If the bars are of the same manufacturer, based on use it's a good habit to move the rails frequently from one set of bars to another. It also is a good practice to move the rails from high to low and reverse the direction of the bars. Not all, but many gyms tend to have a higher number of giant type move in one direction than the other. Reversing the bars will ensure more uniform wear and extend the life span of the rails.

While rotating your rails you will find it a good time to note the wear patterns or and recognized abnormalities. You will be amazed at how much better the manufacturer will react if, when you are questioning a potential warranty situation, you present them with your service and maintenance log to support your proper care of your equipment.

All of this takes time, but its time well invested. It's not that dissimilar from how you treat your athletes. The moment you identify a sore muscle or joint you probably know all the right treatments to recommend - Ice, rest, additional warmup, stretching, improved strength preparation. By immediate and proper treatment of the warning signs you can avoid the more serious and costly break or tear. As with your athletes, your equipment rarely "just breaks". There are signs of wear and if you react properly you can avoid a costly loss or break.

So what are the warning signs that we should be aware of? And what should we do? Here are a few suggestions:

- Warn spots on your bars – reverse direction and rotate from high to low or to another set of bars.
- Puckering spots on landing mats indicate the foam inside the mat is probably lost some elasticity and the landing are causing the vinyl to be over stretched – Spin the mat to change the most common landing spot and/or flip the foam inside the mat.
- Tumble tramp bed seems to have a soft spot – reverse the entire tumble tramp or reverse the bed and double its life.
- Cables on uneven bars showing wear or a broken strand – Once you see this, it's probably too late, but if you regularly replace the little wheels inside your cable tightners, you will avoid having to replace your cable. Even one broken strand on your cable is reason to replace the cable.
- Any mat that becomes overly soft or loses its shape usually indicates that the foam has lost its life. – by replacing the foam you can save the life of the vinyl cover. Always obtain the replacement foam from

the original manufacturer of the mat. Keeping each product with one manufacturer will maintain your warranties, and product liability.

Tending to these and other strains of your equipment will help you keep your equipment and mats in good working condition. Invest in maintenance and avoid the major expense.

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