

Safety Policy

Guide to Swiss Ball Use and Commercial Fitness Centres & Health Clinics

Duty of Care

As a fitness centre proprietor you have a responsibility to ensure the safety of your clients whilst in your facility. In particular, you have a responsibility to ensure that all equipment is safe and does not present any danger to your clients. Having a safety policy in operation for your facility sends a positive message to your clients that you care about their safety. A safety policy may also be viewed positively by public liability insurance companies resulting in reduced insurance premiums.

Swiss Balls

Swiss balls are an important training and rehabilitation tool. They are, however, unlike any other equipment used in a fitness centre, and require a daily safety procedure to be implemented to ensure that they are fit for use by clients and staff.

Damage to balls will reduce its "burst resistance", it may even nullify it – that is, they can burst. It is essential that every effort is made to identify damaged balls and remove them from use.

It is almost impossible to ensure that Swiss Balls are not kicked or pressed against sharp edges in a Gym or Fitness Centre environment. All Swiss Balls should be replaced every 6 months regardless of appearance. Often slight damage that is not visible on the surface has resulted in greater damage to the inner structure of the wall.

The following guidelines are provided to assist you to maintain your Swiss Balls so they are safe for your clients to use. Swiss Balls are excellent tools to incorporate within a training regime. But the following points are VERY IMPORTANT;

- Swiss Balls are an air filled product
- Swiss Balls are usually made of elastic PVC
- Swiss Balls are prone to damage in fitness centres because of proximity of metal equipment and through inappropriate use, eg kicking
- Swiss balls are often deflated by a user and rarely topped up for safe use.
- Swiss Balls are prone to wearing after prolonged use in unsupervised environments.

Unlike most of the mechanical equipment that may be used in your facility Swiss Balls are vulnerable.

Compliance with the following care and use guidelines are recommended to ensure the safety of your clients.

1. Have a Safety Poster clearly visible near Ball stations (available free from www.aokhealth.com and www.mediball.com) for clients and staff.
2. Have a Swiss Ball Safety Policy for all staff – this should be part of the induction process
3. ALWAYS ensure inflation guidelines are followed for the ball – never exceed maximum diameter marked on ball. Optimal diameter is usually approx 5% less than Maximum diameter. Balls should be checked daily. Mark a wall close by showing vertical heights for each ball size.
4. Always write the date the ball was inflated (and batch number if available) near the label to help maintain ball in best “user life” cycle.
5. The balls should be numbered (ball asset register) and details of inflation date, batch number (from label), inspection columns, and this should be used for regular checks on ball condition. See example Table 1 below)
6. Check the surface of your Swiss Balls for deformity or damage **every day** and replace any suspect balls.
7. If a ball is deemed unsafe it should immediately cut with scissors (3-9 cms) to make it impossible to inflate and find its way back onto the facility floor.
8. ALWAYS keep the ball out of direct sunlight and a direct heat source
9. ALWAYS perform Swiss Ball exercises on a padded floor or mat .
10. If being used in association with resistance tools such as medicine balls or dumbbells the environment should be safe – thick floor matting such as judo/gymnastic mats, a catching partner or system to catch the object if it falls.
11. ALWAYS supervise clients and instruct them on the correct use of the ball relevant to their existing balance skill or physical condition. High risk groups such as the elderly, overweight or obvious physical impairment should only train under supervision. Getting on and off the ball will pose a risk for the user.
12. REGULARLY upgrade your Swiss Balls – 6 to 12 months is thought to be preferred time scale

Never do the following;

1. NEVER Inflate the ball to a size greater than its recommended size -
2. NEVER attempt to repair a damaged or marked ball
3. NEVER use a ball that was inflated more than 6 months ago.
4. NEVER use a ball that has been kicked, hit or misused
5. NEVER inflate the ball in temperatures greater than 32°C NEVER inflate the ball in temperature less than 18°C
6. NEVER leave the ball near a heat source as the ball may explode due to expansion of the air inside the ball.

