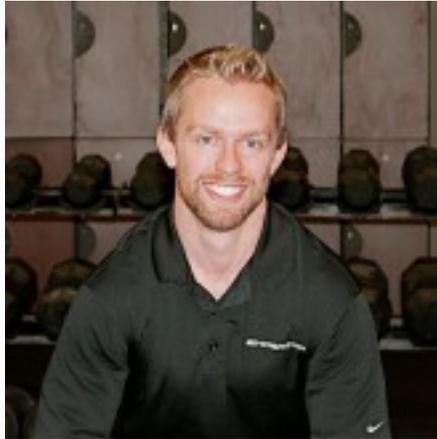


The Truth About Skating Treadmills



- **Posted by** Kevin Neeld Mar 25, 2009
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Skating treadmills have become big business, hailed as the cure for slow hockey players. A look at the research shows that hockey players tend to increase their stride frequency on a skating treadmill compared to on-ice training, probably because of the increased friction of the skating treadmill surface. That makes sense. The take home is that for any given skating speed, you'll have to turn your feet over quicker on a treadmill than on ice.

Random tangent: Growing up, I remember hearing lots of coaches emphasize the importance of lengthening your skating stride. I don't disagree with this coaching cue at all, but thought it is necessary to present that research on different stride types has shown that those utilizing short/choppy strides, on average, were just as fast as those using longer strides. Obviously, for any given speed, utilizing shorter strides will require a higher stride frequency, but some people are just wired that way. With more experienced hockey players, I'm less likely to try to change their stride type than I am improve their edges and overall athleticism.

I've learned to be skeptical about cure-all solutions. The skating treadmill is a tool, with specific uses. If you're considering paying to use a skating treadmill, consider the following things:

1. Do you have a good forward skating stride?
2. Are you comfortable on both your inside and outside edges moving forward and backward?
3. Can you quickly change directions while skating forward AND backward?
4. Can you quickly pivot between forward and backward skating?
5. Have you done anything to improve the strength/power of your legs and hips?

Truthfully answering these questions is extremely important. Here's why:

The skating treadmill is an EXCELLENT tool to help hockey players perfect their forward skating stride and to get a ton of medium and high speed repetitions in to reinforce the new movement pattern. Unfortunately, I suspect that most people just throw their hockey players on the treadmill and don't do much to coach the QUALITY of the movement. If used properly, I think the skating treadmill can be effectively used to improve skating stride and forward skating speed.

Unfortunately, the skating treadmill will do very little for most of the aspects of skating used commonly in games. Consider questions 2, 3, and 4. You won't be on your outside edges or transitioning from forward to backward skating on a treadmill.

Once you perfect your skating stride, the key to speed is to drastically improve your muscular size and power. This can be done at the same time as skating treadmill training, but it's important not to overlook. Most elite level hockey players have legs the size of tree trunks. This not only implies lower body strength and power, but means that a large percentage of their body weight will be in their lower body, lowering their center of mass, improving their stability, and making them harder to knock off the puck. See how these all go hand in hand?

To your success,

Kevin Neeld

Kevin Neeld Knows Hockey

Kevin has rapidly established himself as a leader in the field of physical preparation and sports science for ice hockey. He is currently the Head Performance Coach for the Boston Bruins, where he oversees all aspects of designing and implementing the team's performance training program, as well as monitoring the players' performance, workload and recovery. Prior to Boston, Kevin spent 2 years as an Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach for the San Jose Sharks after serving as the Director of Performance at Endeavor Sports Performance in Pitman, NJ. He also spent 5 years as a Strength and Conditioning Coach with USA Hockey's Women's Olympic Hockey Team, and has been an invited speaker at conferences hosted by the NHL, NSCA, and USA Hockey.