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As someone who suffered from SEVERE twisties throughout my entire career... The extra stress and fear that is added to the already existing stress and fear is NO JOKE. Imagine trying to do a double layout but then accidentally doing a double double... not so fun or safe. - [Sean Melton](#), former USA National Team Member and Ohio State gymnast

I've had the twisties since I was 11. I cannot imagine the fear of having it happen to you during competition. They have [very] limited equipment & mats in Tokyo to help something like this get fixed, let alone within a day. You have absolutely no control over your body and what it does. And the most you psych yourself about it, the worse it becomes. There was a point in time where I couldn't even do a back roll without wanting to turn my head to twist. It's extremely dangerous especially since the mats they train on aren't as forgiving as a foam pit or a soft and squishy mat. You can't control yourself and what your body is going to do next [therefore] risking your life. It's hard explaining this to someone who doesn't do gymnastics but please know that for the safety of these athletes both physically and mentally, this was for the best. - [Aleah Finnegan](#), LSU gymnast and former USA National Team Member

It's hard to explain the twisties to someone who doesn't do gymnastics, but it's a mental block and it's real. I had it happen twice, when I was 12 and 20. You cannot fix it quickly - can take months, if at all. It's like a non-serious stroke, [your] brain and body disconnect and you can feel how to do something in your brain but you can't make your body respond. You can twist the wrong direction, or start out twisting and get lost right on takeoff and you end up bailing out of the skill so you don't crash... Also, the twisties and balking are similar issues and yet different. Twisties is specifically getting lost on twisting skills, but you can usually flip straight like double backs, yurchenko layouts, hand fronts, flick lays on beam, just fine. Balking is starting into any skill and trying to stop after creating inertia, whether it's on a round off, off the vault table, on a beam series, during a big tumbling pass. etc. Balking can be as mental as the twisties or it can be [an] attempt to not crash on something because you messed up the prior skill and you're trying not to crash. Usually you crash just [as] bad - bailing is very dangerous. Lots of broken arms from flying backwards, and potential neck injuries from bailing with a lot of power. - [Melissa Marlowe OLY](#), Olympian, former Utah gymnast, and five-time NCAA champion

Mental struggles often result in gymnasts getting something we refer to as the twisties. It's when your body stops doing what you want it to do & seemingly develops a mind of its own--adding twists or even extra flips to the skill you set out to do. High level gymnastics can be scary as fuck when you are in the right mental state to do it. When you start feeling like you can't even

control your own body in a sport that requires the MOST precision to execute safely, it's downright TERRIFYING. When you try too hard to force your way through it, it can spiral into other things. I once developed a nasty case of the twisties that my coaches tried to force me through that spiraled into me not being able to do a single backwards skill on ANY event (not even a backward roll on floor) for almost TWO WHOLE YEARS. I was a level 9, & it was never the original gymnastics skill I was scared of (still a daredevil to this day), but rather something completely unrelated. And then it still wasn't the skills, it was the feeling out of control that kept it all so scary. Flying through the air with no ability to control what I was doing, despite knowing exactly how to do it. That period of my career destroyed my back and ultimately took me out of the sport. Something similar literally resulted in my current coaching partner breaking her back (at the dreaded Ranch, no less). OK that's the end of my rant. I just wanted to explain that it is truly not something you can simply muscle through in the name of sport. - [@Christina_M57](#) on twitter, former gymnast and current coach

Getting the twisties is so traumatizing that it's been over seven years since it last happened and I still have dreams a few times a month where I get them. I went the last seven years of my career never doing a plain back 3/2 in order to avoid triggering another episode, they're one of the most detrimental things your mind does to itself out of nowhere. - [Tess McCracken](#), former Penn State gymnast

If you're a gymnast you KNOW the twisties are absolutely terrifying, dangerous, & can take months to fix. I've had teammates have to quit the sport after getting them. They're actually the worst thing in the world. - [McKenna Linnen](#), former WVU gymnast

When I was 14 I was trying to upgrade my back full on floor to a double full. I was doing them so well on the tumble strip that landed on the resi. The first time I brought the skill to the real floor I got completely lost and crashed - thankfully I was OK. After that I was scared to do more than a full. It took me until I was 17 to get over that fear, when I finally got a back 1-1/2. Even after that I would never back tumble in the offseason, and would be so scared for the first time I had to do that pass on the real floor when season started up. - *Megan (Dahl) Knops, former UW-Stout gymnast*

... Having the "twisties" means that her inner gyroscope which gives her the cat-like ability to land on her feet isn't working quite right. It is similar to a baseball player experiencing the "yips", having writer's block, or a golf player experiencing the "shanks". When a golf player experiences the shanks, their ball goes flying off out of control in wonky directions. In Simone's case, her body is the equivalent of the ball. If she can't determine which way is up while flipping and twisting in the air it can have catastrophic results. She is wise to listen to this 6th gymnastics sense and take a step back to give herself a chance to reset. In the past, there have been other gymnasts who have pushed on in similar circumstances, and it did not go well... - [anonymous Brevet judge](#)

She was mentally not doing well, which was also causing her to get lost in the air... which never happens to her. I experienced those mental blocks throughout my career as a gymnast, and to be quite blunt, it only took one bad time of getting lost (or what they call the "twisties") in the air in a big flip to break my neck and leave me paralyzed... most likely for life.... So I'm SO SO glad she decided to

not continue until she's mentally recovered. Especially at her skill difficulty! I knew that putting the weight of the world on her shoulders by her own ego & letting the world put the weight of the world on her shoulders was going to catch up to her eventually...// It just sucks it was the Olympics where the humbling and reality of being human had to happen. We all live and we learn... no one is perfect...- [Jacoby Miles](#), former gymnast who was paralyzed in a gymnastics accident

Now let's talk about mental health and mental blocks. I have been in the same situation many times when tremendous pressure is on top of you, when everyone [is] relying on you and you are the one and only person who delivers time after time, after time... Person who is NOT a robot, [a] person with incredible [difficulty] and on top of everything else doing gymnastics with [a] smile on her face. In gymnastics mental blocks are common, I had several of them [through] my [career] and I will tell you it's no joke, no play, it's reality when your brain [shuts] down however physically you should be able to perform. Mental blocks are sudden and unexplainable and you are at [a loss] because just [a second ago] you didn't have them. I can go on and on and on about it but at this point I want to let Simone know we all thinking of her, wishing we can watch greatest athlete of all times competing again but for now let's take a break, re charge and wait what next day brings - [Svetlana Boginskaya](#), three-time Olympic champion in gymnastics

The pressure of competing at the Olympics is immense. Experiencing a mental block, or what in gymnastics we call, "the twisties", with the world watching you, is terrifying. My heart goes out to Simone. Mental blocks are no joke. Someone who's never experienced one would have no idea. Having experienced "the twisties", I can tell you, they come out of nowhere. One moment [you're] fine, then the next you have no idea where you are in the air. You think you've twisted twice and you're going to land on your feet, but you've only twisted once and [you're] on your back. With the level of difficulty Simone is doing, not knowing where you are in the air, is not only terrifying but extremely dangerous. To honor what she was experiencing and take a step back, at the Olympic Games, in front of the world, is courageous. Coming back out to cheer her team to Silver medal win, is heroic. Her vulnerability made it ok, for millions of boys, girls, men and women around the world, to not be ok. Medals don't change the world, people do. - [Betty Okino](#), 1992 Olympic team bronze medalist

The twisties is doing the wrong skill or getting lost in the air as you twist. For instance at one point in my career when I would try to do a double layout I would twist instead of doing the double layout. It's scary and it can be dangerous, especially landing on hard landings. It then turned into me not being able to [do just] a layout, back tuck, layout on vault, or a layout off the beam. I had to go back to backward rolls to get my body to flip backwards without twisting. - [Ariana Guerra](#), former US National Team member, Alabama gymnast, and 2018 SEC Floor champion

Hi, your friendly neighborhood former gymnast and diver here to attempt to explain the mental phenomenon Simone Biles is experiencing: the dreaded twisties. When you're flipping or twisting (or both!) it is very disorienting to the human brain. When training new flips and twists, you need external cues to learn how it feels to complete the trick correctly. (In diving, a coach yells "OUT" and you kick your body straight and pray). Once you've practiced a trick enough, you develop the neural pathways that create kinesthesia which leads to muscle memory. Your brain remembers how your body feels doing the trick and you gain air awareness. Think about something that took you a while to learn and

required a lot of concentration at the time to get it right, but now is second nature. Driving a car is a good example (especially stick!) Suddenly, in the middle of driving on the freeway, right as you need to complete a tricky merge, you have totally lost your muscle memory of how to drive a car. You have to focus on making your foot press the pedal at the right angle, turn the steering wheel just so, shift gears.. It's terrifying. You're moving way too fast, you're totally lost, you're trying to THINK but you know you don't usually have to think to do these maneuvers, you just feel them and do them. The twisties are like this, and often happen under pressure. You're working so hard to get it right that you stop trusting your muscle memory. You're getting lost in the air, second guessing your instincts, overthinking every movement. It's not only scary and unnerving, it's incredibly dangerous even if you're doing basic gymnastics. The level of skills Simone throws combined with the height and power she gets can lead to catastrophic injury if you're not confident and connected to your kinesthesia. This isn't as easy to fix as just sleeping it off and hoping for a better day tomorrow. It can look like retraining entire routines and tricks. I never mastered my front 1.5 with a full twist because I'd get the twisties and it would mess with my other twisting dives. So. When Simone says she's taking it day by day, this is why. She's not soft. She didn't choke. She isn't giving up. It's a phenomenon every gymnast and diver has experienced and she happens to be experiencing it at the Olympics. Can you imagine the frustration? The heartbreak? I'll also add that [@Simone_Biles](#) choosing to bow out pushes back against a dark narrative in gymnastics that you sacrifice yourself for the sake of the sport; you are the product of your coaches and you owe them wins, no matter the personal cost. No. You owe nobody anything, and you especially don't owe them your body, your health, or your autonomy. I hope every single tiny baby gymnast got that message on self advocacy and setting boundaries loud and clear. Thank you, [@Simone_Biles](#). - [Catherine Burns](#), former gymnast and diver

When I was about 12 I got twisties when learning how to front twist. I had never learned how to do a front full but when trying to do a front half my body would automatically do another half twist. I understood I was supposed to only be doing a half but for some reason my mind wouldn't do what I was telling it to, I would get lost in the air, and land in sketchy ways. This stressed me and my coaches out; I was willing and eager to do anything asked of me, and for some reason I couldn't figure this simple skill out. It stressed me out so much (it was all I would think about throughout the day) that it didn't just become an issue when I was trying to front twist and I started to have issues with any front tumbling, to the point where I was doing roundoffs instead of front handsprings. I had to spend weeks one on one with my coaches, going back to the super basics (forward roll, then front walkover, then front handspring, front handspring to dive roll, and finally making my way back to a front handspring front layout), all onto the squishy mats. It was so humiliating to not be able to do skills I had been doing for years, watching my teammates practice level 10 skills while I was having to do forward rolls. It took me so much longer than my teammates to figure out front twisting, and even when I did I couldn't bring myself to do it out of a front handspring, fearing I'd get the twisties again. In the 8 years of gymnastics after getting the twisties I never competed a front twisting skill. Confusingly, it never impacted my back twisting and I had no issues with back 2 1/2s and triple fulls, even into college. I can't imagine what Simone's going through with her twisties, especially with the difficulty of her skills. I'm so relieved she was able to make the decision to stop going when she couldn't safely compete. - *Eileen Imbus, former ASU gymnast*

The twisties are no joke, and can be extremely dangerous. The yips, but potentially life threatening. It's like being battered by a wave, where you don't even know which way is up. Very hard to overcome without getting back to trampoline and pit in environment you feel secure in. - [Mark Williams](#), *OU Men's Gymnastics coach and 2016 Olympic gymnastics head coach*

The twisties. Sometimes called the "yips" in ball sports. I had them as a level 10 gymnast. I could do a 2.5 twist on floor no problem. Then one day I couldn't even do a full. I would punch to do the flip, fly sideways through the air and am down on my side on the mat. I had to go to the tumble track (a long trampoline) and do [a] back flip, land, jump full turn. Then I would do just a quarter turn right before I landed. You go back to basics and have to relearn skills you have been doing for years. It's [scary] and frustrating. It took me a few days to relearn my skills and I had pits and soft mats. Being at the Olympics and getting the twisties has to be the worst possible thing. Simone has competed with a kidney stone and broken toes. She's tough as nails. She knows herself and is incredibly brave. Suni, Jordan, and Grace killed it. All the women should be incredibly proud of themselves. America loves them and is so happy they won silver. - [Emily Sweeney](#), *former Level 10 gymnast*

One former US elite gymnast I talked to said that if it was someone other than Simone Biles who had made that same error, they would have certainly blown a knee, at minimum. Another said if it had happened to her instead of Simone, "I probably would have ended up paralyzed." Most non-gymnastics fans do not understand the seriousness of what happened because she landed on her feet. Every elite gymnast I've talked to has said that Simone Biles's vault was TERRIFYING and it's a miracle she put that vault to her feet & avoided seriously injuring herself. Most non-gymnastics fans do not understand the seriousness of what happened because she landed on her feet. Every elite gymnast I've talked to has said that Simone Biles's vault was TERRIFYING and it's a miracle she put that vault to her feet & avoided seriously injuring herself. Imagine being driven into the ground directly onto your head/neck/back from 10 feet in the air, with the force of 15x your body weight. THOSE are the stakes here. People need to understand that before they run their mouths. Simone is an elite athlete and the greatest of all time - she would not take pulling out of two Olympic finals lightly. This is NOT comparable to other sports. Proud of her selfless decision and wishing her the time and space she needs to rest and recover. - [Deanna Hong](#), *Producer for GOLDEN on Peacock and UCLA Gymnastics Videographer*

Hi, I would like to share my story of the twisties but remain anonymous. I had been doing gymnastics for 16 years and at the college level and I got the twisties right before season. No matter how many times you've done a skill, once you get lost it's never the same again. This went on for two more years and I had to have sports psychology appointments to try and overcome it. My best bet was to distract my mind and essentially "black out" while I twisted to prevent myself from balking. It caused me so much anxiety and I no longer enjoyed going to practice or gymnastics at all. Not to sound dramatic but it overcame my life at that time. Unfortunately I wasn't able to twist ever again without having extreme anxiety and fear that I would do something dangerous. - *anonymous former gymnast*

The twisties literally make you want to quit gymnastics because they don't just go away. They make it so hard to come into the gym everyday knowing your mind and body are fighting against each other. Most gymnasts can definitely recall when they've had them and it's never fun. - [Sierra Brooks](#), current Michigan gymnast and 2021 NCAA team champion

When I was an elite gymnast I almost quit gymnastics because of the twisties. It is scary to say the least. Gymnastics is not just physically difficult, but mentally as well. I applaud Simone for doing what she needed to do to stay safe and healthy. #MentalHealthMatters - [Hallie Mossett](#), former UCLA gymnast and US National Team Member, current LIU Assistant Coach

Had the twisties at a gymnastics competition once, ending up tearing my ACL at just 15 years old. Simone is smart and brave to step back for her team and her health. #Simone - [Niki Moya](#), former gymnast