



ARTISTIC
GYMNASTICS



A beginner's guide

sport**se**ngine



Have a child starting gymnastics?

Congratulations! Gymnastics is a fun, unique sport that has provided some of the world's most memorable sports moments ("1996, Kerri Strug?!"). While trying a new sport can be a bit scary for all involved, we know once you get started you and your child are going to love the thrill of the mat.

Once formally deemed just a European sport, gymnastics has seen an explosion of popularity all over the world. Participation continues to grow year after year. And for a good reason! It's considered one of the Olympics' premier sports, promising a thrill for all who participate and watch. Competitive gymnastics can be a new experience for many, especially those without a background in the sport. However, you'll fit in at any gym with a little more understanding of how the sport works, the gear needed, and learning key terms. This guide has all the information you and your child need to join one of America's favorite athletic endeavors.



WORDS OF ADVICE

Parents and coaches shared information they wish they had before their kids started gymnastics.

Get to know the sport.

The rules of gymnastics are unique and can sometimes even confuse the savviest of gymnastics fans. Don't stay in the dark - ask the coaches, gym staff, or other parents any questions you have about the upcoming competitions or practice requirements. This guide is a great place to start!

Practice, practice, practice.

General athleticism and fitness can be trained anywhere from at home to the local park. However, save practicing specific gymnastics skills and moves for when you have expert supervision. Most facilities will have open gym sessions for gymnasts to get extra practice time to perfect their skills. Many gyms also offer different classes athletes can sign up for to work with a coach on sharpening any skill - whether on the bar, beam, or floor.

Commitment.

Unlike many other sports, gymnastics is not seasonal. While there is an "off-season," for competition, it is a year-round commitment.

Play other sports, too.

Encourage your child to try other sports and avoid gymnastics fatigue. Certain gymnastics skills—like body awareness, quick reactions, and conditioning—can be practiced by participating in other sports, too. Then communicate anything you feel he or she should know about your child early in the season. A good coach will be open and honest about goals, expectations, and methods. Don't forget to ask the coach if there is anything you can help with!

Become familiar with your child's coach.

At the recreational levels, your child's coach will likely change yearly. So, introduce yourself to the coach and get to know his or her coaching philosophies. Then communicate anything you feel he or she should know about your child early in the season. Once your child moves to the competitive track, it will be common for a gymnast to have the same coach for years. A good coach will be open and honest about goals, expectations, and methods.

Be positive and respectful.

Unless otherwise appointed, your job at the gym is to support and cheer for your kid. Focus on the positives as he or she learns the sport and avoid any coaching from chairs in the lobby.

Focus on life skills, not scholarships.

Gymnastics, like any other sport, is not a financial plan for college. Fewer than 1 percent of high school athletes receive athletic scholarships and only five make the Olympic team (every four years). Encourage your child to focus on the valuable lessons they can learn from gymnastics—like how to handle winning and losing, overcoming challenges while learning a new skill, managing relationships with coaches and teammates, and the benefits of being active. Above all, focus on having fun!

Pick the right program for your child.

There are many gymnastics disciplines and programs to choose from that vary in cost, time commitment, and competition level. Choose a program that suits your child's interests and skill levels. [See: "Ways to Play"]

For more information, visit:

sportsengine.com/gymnastics/words-of-advice



Gymnastics takes a long time to master! Female gymnasts achieve mastery from 14 until 18 years old. Male gymnasts master the sport from their late teens until their early 20s.



FUNDAMENTALS OF THE SPORT

Before your child enters the gym, it's helpful to understand the basics of the sport and what to expect.



Levels:

Each state or national governing body will have slight variations, but gymnasts will be placed at a level that fits their skill difficulty. To move up a level, a gymnast must earn a qualification score at a competition and learn new, more difficult skills. A gymnast would not move up a level just because of age.

For example, here is how USA Gymnastics has broken down its levels:

The **Women's** and **Men's Development Programs** were created with the belief that all athletes, regardless of their potential, must have a solid foundation of basic skills to advance safely. There are ten levels to advance through. The program allows athletes to advance at their own pace, competing in more than one level in a year if he or she chooses.

The USA Gymnastics **Xcel program** is for both **Women** and **Men** as well, it was developed as an alternative competitive program offering individual flexibility to coaches and gymnasts. The goal of Xcel is to provide gymnasts of varying abilities and commitment levels the opportunity for a rewarding gymnastics experience.

The Xcel program focuses on sportsmanship, leadership, teamwork, and fun. The emphasis in the Xcel program is on correct technique, form, and performance. Levels include: Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, and Sapphire.



Time:

On average, competitions (known as meets) are 2-3 hours, but this can depend on the size of the competition, and the number of gymnasts in the session. Practices can range from 2-4 hours a day depending on the level.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/gymnastics/fundamentals



The AAI (American Athletic, Inc.) Award is considered the "Heisman Trophy" of Women's Collegiate Gymnastics. It is presented annually to the most outstanding senior female gymnast.



FUNDAMENTALS OF THE SPORT (CONT.)



Individual Scoring:

A gymnast event score is an average score from the two judges. Each level and event will have requirements for each gymnast to compete. Judges evaluate how well each gymnast performs the requirements and add in any difficulty bonus to calculate the score. A gymnastics score is not calculated in whole points but rather from tenths, hundredths, and even thousandths.



Team Scoring:

Each governing body may have a different qualification depending on how many scores are used towards the team score, but typically, the team score is calculated from the club's top 3 scores for each event (or 5 in college). This allows clubs and teams to drop scores from a less successful performance.

For more information, visit:

sportsengine.com/gymnastics/fundamentals



At the 2020 Olympics, the German Women's Gymnastics team chose to wear a pant-style unitard over the more well-known 'bikini' cut leotard. Their outfits comply with the wardrobe rules of the International Gymnastics Federation and bring additional options to cultures that seek more modesty.



THE EVENTS

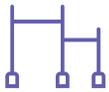
Following these guidelines will help your child as he or she gets ready for gymnastics.



Vault (Men & Women)

Gymnasts sprint down a runway before jumping onto a springboard toward the vault table, which stands about four feet tall. As they push off the vault table, they perform aerial maneuvers before landing on a mat on the opposite side of the runway.

Judges watch for proper body alignment, form, quick repulsion, height, and distance traveled, as well as the number of saltos (flips) and twists. Gymnasts should “stick” their landings by taking no extra steps.



Uneven Bars (Women)

Better known as Bars, the gymnasts swing between the two parallel horizontal bars set at different heights. The entire routine should flow from one movement to the next without pauses, extra swings, or additional support. The most daring parts of the routine are often in the high-flying release moves and dismounts.

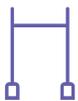
Judges watch for proper body alignment, form, handstand positions, and difficulty of the release and pirouetting skills performed.



Parallel Bars (Men)

Parallel Bars, better known as P. Bars, are two parallel bars approximately 11.5 feet long, 6.4 feet high, and can range from 16.5-20.5 inches apart. A P. Bars routine will consist mostly of swing and flight elements. A gymnast is required to execute swinging elements from a support, hang, and upper arm position.

Judges look for the gymnast to perform swinging elements from a support or hanging position, form while in handstands, and release elements.



High Bar (Men)

The high bar is 9 feet high and consists of swings, release moves, and high-flying dismounts. The event is very difficult because a gymnast must perform release moves 12-15 feet over the bar, which requires a fearless and aggressive effort. He must maintain form throughout the release move and while catching the bar, which is usually a matter of just inches.

Judges watch for several release moves, no execution errors, and a big dismount with a perfect, stuck landing.



THE EVENTS (CONT.)



Balance Beam (Women)

The Beam is four inches wide, four feet off the ground, and sixteen feet long. Gymnasts have 90 seconds to perform a combination of tumbling and leaping skills showcasing power, flexibility, and confidence.

Judges watch for the perfect execution of flexibility and salto combinations with the least amount of wobbling or falls by the gymnast.



Floor Exercise (Men & Women)

The 40'x40' area comprises plywood and springs underneath compressed foam and carpet to allow the gymnasts to gain extra bounce and achieve greater heights (and softer landings). Routines last no more than 90 seconds and cover the entire floor. In women's gymnastics, the floor routine is choreographed to music.

Judges watch for the perfect execution of flexibility and the height of salto combinations, in addition to artistry, beauty, and stamina in the routine.



Pommel Horse (Men)

Pommel horse routines consist of continuous circular movements interrupted only by the required scissors elements. Swinging through a handstand position, with or without turns, is allowed. The hands are the only part of the body that should touch the apparatus and the entire exercise should flow with a steady, controlled rhythm.

Judges watch for the shapes executed while circling the horse, and the rhythm performed throughout.



Rings (Men)

The Rings hang approximately 10 feet from the ground, and a gymnast is looking to achieve stillness and proper body position while performing strength elements. Gymnasts with the best command of the event will display extraordinary strength in arriving at all holds with absolute precision.

Judges look for the gymnast to execute swinging elements from a support, hang and upper arm positioning.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/gymnastics/events



Artistic gymnastics is just one of the eight different gymnastics disciplines recognized by the Federation of International Gymnastics. It is one of three gymnastics disciplines that are included in the Summer Olympics along with Rhythmic Gymnastics and Trampoline.



GYMNASTICS SLANG

There could be an entire dictionary to assist you with the slang used in a gymnastics gym. Here are a few to get you started:

Code of Points: “The Code” is the rules determined by the National Governing Body. The Code outlines the difficulty of each skill, assigns bonus tenths in combining skills and sets the competitive rules. The Code of points is typically revised after each Olympic Games.

Bonus: A gymnast will receive bonus points by competing back-to-back high-level elements in a row. The amount of bonus is determined by the skill ranking in the Code of Points.

Start Value (SV): Is the starting score, or highest score a gymnast can earn. Levels 1-8 automatically have a 10.0 start value. Levels 9 and 10 the gymnast must earn bonus, and meet event requirements to bring their Start Value up to a 10.0.

All Around: An All-Around score is the added-up total from each event competed.

Chalk Bucket: Chalk is used to help the gymnast grip the equipment better. Most commonly used on their hands for bars and rings, the chalk bucket is the station where gymnasts will apply the chalk to their grips.

Rip: Caused by a repetitive swinging motion, callused skin can blister or ‘rip

away’, leaving an open, exposed area of tender skin.

Stick: When a dismount, or skill is performed with no steps or wobbles after a successful completion.

The Pit: An area filled with foam blocks. The blocks will ensure a soft landing when practicing new skills.

8 Incher: A landing mat commonly used for dismounting. This mat is eight inches thick.

Spot: When a coach assists the gymnast through a skill.

March In: Introduction of the teams and gymnasts before the competition begins.

Olympic Order: The order of events in a competition. For Women that order is Vault, Bars, Beam, Floor. For Men it’s Floor, Pommel Horse, Rings, Vault, P. Bars, and High Bar.

Board: Short for a springboard. The springboard is a wood platform with springs that a gymnast will use to propel themselves onto the equipment. It is always used on vault, and can be used to mount Bars, Beam, or P. Bars.

For more information, visit:

sportsengine.com/gymnastics/slang



At the first modern Olympics in 1896, there were six original gymnastics events: horizontal bars, parallel bars, pommel horse, rings, rope climbing, and vault.



GEARED UP FOR SUCCESS

While it is nearly impossible to find gymnastics equipment at the local sporting goods store, you can find everything you need in your gym's pro shop. There are also plenty of online retailers that give you a selection of practice gear needed for your rising star.



Grips

Grips are worn on your hands to help with the 'grip' of the bar or rings. Made of a leather material, you will see both men and women wearing grips as they advance through the sport.



Leotard/Leo

A tight fitting, one-piece garment made of a stretchy, lycra type of material - both men and women will wear a leotard for competition. Men will have a tank style leotard, while women typically wear a long-sleeve version. In practices, women will wear tank styles, while men tend to practice in athletic shorts and t-shirts.



Warm Up Leo

In some levels, women's gymnastics will have a short sleeve leotard worn during the competition warm up time. Then, they will change into their long sleeve competitive leotard before the competition begins.



Men's Pants/Shorts

In competition, men will wear pants while competing on Pommel Horse, Rings, P. Bars and High Bar. Then switch to shorts for Floor and Vault.



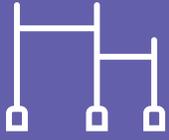
March In Apparel

Before the competition begins, teams and gymnasts are announced at the start. Sometimes, even walking or 'marching in' to the gymnasium. During this time, gymnasts will often wear a warmup. This warmup can be referred to as the march in apparel.



Wristies

Wristies can refer to either the wrist pads one wears under their grips for padding from the leather and straps of a grip, or a protective brace worn on a gymnast's wrist to help with protecting their wrist joints.



WAYS TO PLAY

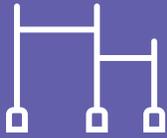
Availability of gymnastics programs can depend on your community's interest and available gyms. However, many communities offer a variety of programs that will fit your child's interests and abilities. With a little research, you'll be able to find a program that suits your child.

Competitive Gymnastics

Age: 5-18	Good for: Gymnasts looking to increase their skills and compete at the highest level.
Commitment: Competitive gymnastics requires a high level of commitment to time and financials, depending on the level and age. This track involves several practices per week and travel on a state, regional, and national level.	Structure: Generally, gymnasts will start in recreational classes, then try out for the competitive team. Commitment level tends to increase with the competitive level. This format is geared toward developing skills and high-level competition.

School Gymnastics

Age: Middle and high schoolers	Good for: Skilled gymnast looking to represent their school and play with their classmates.
Commitment: School gymnastics can be a moderate commitment. Gymnasts practice most days of the week. While the sport is seasonal on the school level, most will still practice year around.	Structure: Gymnasts may be required to try out and placed on a varsity or junior varsity team according to performance.



WAYS TO PLAY (CONT.)

Community/Recreational Gymnastics

Age: Young kids to adults	Good for: Those focused on having fun, being active, and playing with friends.
Commitment: Recreational gymnastics costs less than the competitive track and requires less time. Expect to practice one to two times a week with no pressure to continue from year to year.	Structure: Learning the basics and enjoying the sport is prioritized over competition and skill development. Gymnasts do not have to try out and can choose a class that fits into their schedule. In general, anyone and everyone can participate.

For more information, visit:
sportsengine.com/gymnastics/ways-to-play



In 1976, 14-year-old Nadia Comaneci captivated the world when she earned 3 perfect 10 scores at the Olympic Games. However, the scoring model was changed in 2006, and “the Perfect 10” was eliminated. Now competitors can only dream of getting a Perfect 10.



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