



Men's Artistic Gymnastics

MAG

GYMNASTICS EVOLUTION

Five Great Reasons Boys Should Do Gymnastics

Gymnastics is a lot of things, but one of the things that it most certainly is not is just for girls. The myth is sometimes perpetrated by the fact that the media tends to concentrate on the more glamorous girls when they report on the sport combined with the fact that little girls do tend to be drawn towards the sport from an early age.

But not only are there plenty of boys and men in gymnastics, but some of them are even acknowledged to be some of the strongest athletes of all. In the most recent Men's Health magazine list of the strongest athletes in the world, Japanese gymnast and five-time gold medallist **Kōhei Uchimura** was ranked third, ahead of **LeBron James**, **Usain Bolt** and even footballers like the imposing **Ndamukong Suh**.

So, should boys be encouraged to pursue gymnastics? The answer is a resounding yes and, oddly enough, becoming a competitive gymnast later on may not be the biggest reason to do so. In fact, these five reasons for boys to take gym are, for many, even more important.

It's the Perfect Foundational Introduction to Other Sports

When boys are very young, their motor and cognitive skills are rarely ready for 'traditional' school sports like football, rugby, baseball, soccer or even track. However, in a gymnastics class, boys as young as three or four will more rapidly develop those skills through running, jumping and balancing while also beginning to build strength and flexibility. In many cases this leads to boys simply being the better athletes when they do come to take an interest in the other sports at school.

It Creates Coachable Kids

In any sport the athlete must be able, and willing, to not only listen to a coach, manager or trainer but to accept criticism, follow instructions and be aware of how their actions affect others around them. And while young gymnasts are not drilled by their coaches they do begin to be introduced to all of these concepts which, again, may give a boy an edge over others if you decide to pursue another sport as well.

It's a Great Cross Trainer

If a boy is already involved in another sport taking gymnastics as well will serve as a great cross training exercise. In gymnastics class, he will gain strength, athleticism, stamina and discipline, all things that will benefit him that may not be a part of their training regime in his 'primary' sport.

It's a Character Builder

Boys' gymnastics calls for a great deal of discipline and perseverance. Getting the often-complex moves just right can be frustrating and take a lot of work. The payoff however when things do come together is a big, character building confidence boost. And a confident, hardworking and disciplined athlete is someone a coach in any sport is always looking to add to their team.

They May Fall in Love

Although they don't always receive as much attention as their female counterparts' competitive male gymnasts of all ages tend to be some of the most dedicated and hardworking athletes of all and often just because they love it. And that may very well end up being the case for your child, as it has been for so many boys before him.

BEGINNER Age 6 – 8 INITIATION AND MOTOR SKILLS ACQUISITION



The wide range of movements and positions makes it possible for children to develop cognitively, linguistically, socially, emotionally and physically which has a positive impact on their psychosomatic status. Highly developed motor abilities and large movement skills can enable better every day functioning. During that time, motor learning needs to be perceived as a process of gradual skills acquisition. This process starts with first incorrect, clumsy and slow attempts, over basic structures acquisition, to superior performance of skills in different circumstances. Fundamental movement skills (FMS) are skills that enable children to interact and explore their environment. Besides being fundamental, and irreplaceable in most human abilities and features, these INFLUENCES OF FUNDAMENTAL MOVEMENT. Science of Gymnastics Journal movement structures make a firm base for the development of more advanced and complex movement skills

ADVANCE Age 8 – 10
PREPARATION AND BASIC TECHNICAL SKILLS ACQUISITION



More precise definition of goals

- willingness of parents to support
 - state of health / physique
 - intellectual capacity
 - personal motivation towards artistic gymnastics
- check to determine capacity to develop general prerequisites
 - motor ability
 - speed / agility / reaction capacity
 - flexibility, strength and power
 - psychological
- pedagogical aspects, such as courage, fear
 - capacity for expression

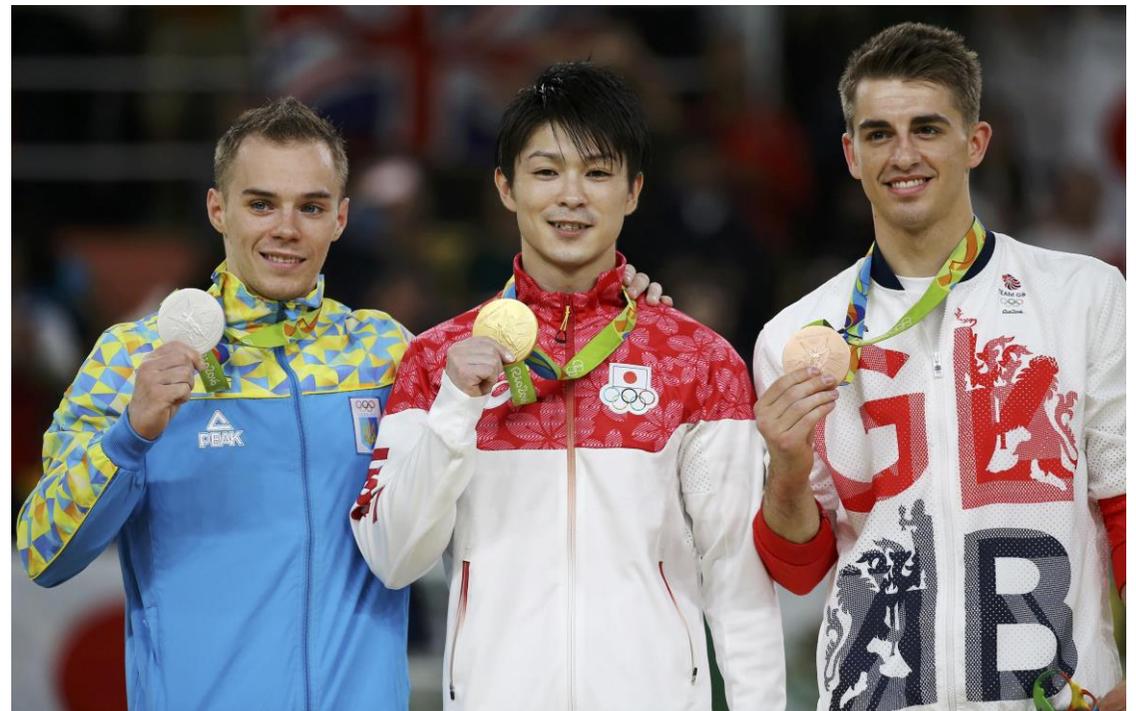
PERFORMER Age 10 – 15 JUNIOR HOPES

REFINEMENT AND PERFECTION

ELITE JUNIOR Age 15 - 17



SENIOR Age 17+



BENEFITS OF GYMNASTICS

- **Development of fundamental motor skills, postural control and motor coordination**

Gymnastics is an excellent vehicle for teaching basic motor skills and promoting health-related fitness in children of all ages. The fundamental motor patterns that are best learned through a gymnastics education are: static shapes and static-dynamic balance, jumping & landing, rolling, turning & twisting, hopping, skipping & galloping, crawling & climbing, and stepping & leaping. The gymnastics learning environment (via varieties of —fields of play and apparatus) is unique in human movement in that it demands complex gravity defying body movements that require specific joint actions to be carefully aligned with the gymnast's space, direction, time and rhythm. This may not be the case with other —game-based activities that focus on narrow, yet important, aspects of the fundamental motor patterns (e.g. throwing & catching, hitting & kicking). The next findings showed that gymnasts' proprioceptive system is more efficient than that of non-gymnasts, and that this may be the result of gymnastics training. The final study investigated the influence of gymnastics training on the postural control of children in age groups, aged 5-7 and 9-11 years old with and without the use of visual information. Younger gymnasts presented greater postural control with visual information compared to younger non-gymnasts.

- **Gymnasts can learn to jump, land and fall safely**

Children who participate in gymnastics can learn to fall without injuring themselves. Gymnasts learn to jump, land, and fall during skill practice on matting and apparatus. Learning to jump, land, roll and fall helps gymnast avoid injury and can help prevent injuries in most sports. Gymnasts acquire a very "cat-like" ability to right themselves and to fall without being hurt.

- **Physical-Fitness benefits**

Gymnastics participation requires, and develops, a myriad of fitness abilities. These include a high level of local muscular endurance, strength, power, joint flexibility, co-ordination, speed & agility, balance, and a highly developed kinesthetic sense. Indeed, the variety of physical manipulations of the body that a gymnast will experience can be much greater than those of any other activity; the decathlon included. These physical demands and their outcomes have placed gymnasts among the leanest, strongest and most flexible of athletes.

- Developing aerobic endurance and anaerobic endurance**

Gymnasts tend to have average levels of aerobic (with oxygen) endurance, and high to very high levels of anaerobic endurance. Gymnastics performances usually last under 120 seconds. The level of intensity of gymnastics activities can be high and the duration too short for the development of high levels of aerobic endurance as observed, for example, in long-distance running sports. However, most sports are anaerobic in nature. Anaerobic endurance means “without oxygen” endurance and this refers to the predominant use of in-muscle energy supplies to provide the necessary short bursts of muscle strength that must prevail in power sports such as gymnastics.
- Developing relative strength**

One of the major benefits of children’s participation in gymnastics compared to that of untrained peers and participants in other sports is enhanced strength. Using a mixed longitudinal design, the development of flexibility and isometric strength of the upper and lower limbs was studied for 2 years in 453 young athletes (aged between 9 and 18 years) practicing football, gymnastics, swimming or tennis. Boys and girls in all sports were of similar strength up to around 11 years. Male gymnasts 12 years and older, who were still increasing their muscle strength up to 19 years, were significantly stronger than all other athletes. Gymnastics training provides an invaluable vehicle for this strength training in early childhood, late childhood and adolescence.
- Developing balanced posture and “core” muscular strength**

Participation in basic gymnastics skills requires that upper and lower limbs are alternating bases of support and locomotion. This occurs while the mid-body provides high levels of control and stability. Gymnastics-based performance actions require —core body training which is unique to this sport. Gymnastics training can provide a complete, balanced mid-body and —postural muscle conditioning.
- Development of flexibility**

The skill related flexibility demands of gymnastics are probably the most significant and unique aspects that serve to separate gymnastics from other sports. A high level of flexibility can be an effective aid to the reduction of injury, preventing persons from forcing a limb to an injurious range of motion. Gymnastics can provide this superior level of flexibility.

- **Enhancing both static and dynamic balance**

Gymnastics has entire events devoted to both static and dynamic balance - the pommel horse and still rings. Gymnasts learn to effectively balance on their feet and their hands through the ubiquitous use of handstands and myriads of balance skills on all apparatus. A recent literature review compared the balance ability of athletes from different benefits of gymnastics participation for school children sports. Based on the available data from cross-sectional studies, gymnasts tended to have the best balance ability, followed by soccer players, swimmers, active control subjects and then basketball players.

- **Gymnastics offers important bone forming and bone strengthening advantages**

There is now considerable evidence that participating in gymnastics can have significant and long-term osteogenic (bone forming-strengthening) advantages for boys, girls and young women over their less active peers and athletes in most other activities or sports.

These significant long-term osteogenic benefits are due to the non-muscular loading through impact activities and the gymnastics specific muscular loading on skeletal tissue. While competitive gymnastics participation has been shown to be beneficial in bone forming and strengthening, recent investigations into non-competitive (recreational) gymnastics participation have produced similar findings that highlight the longevity of the benefits of gymnastics participation.

- **Academic performance**

There is some evidence to suggest that school students who are physically active perform better academically. However, the mechanisms by which physical education, sport, and gymnastics in particular might contribute to cognitive and academic developments are not fully understood. There is, however, some persuasive evidence to suggest that physical activity can improve children's concentration and arousal, which might indirectly benefit academic performance. Generally, physical activity can also increase academic performance indirectly by improving emotional health, self-esteem, and alertness—all of which are related to improved academic performance.

- **Gymnastics enhances Task Mastery orientations**

Decades of sports based research reviewed have shown that skill mastery (task oriented) sport programs and "task-based" motivational climates are keys to high participation rates and long-term engagement in junior sport. When many other sport activities are innately competitive and ego-oriented (through a "win-lose" of a race or game) gymnastics can be more task-oriented based around the performance of skills. Children's participation in gymnastics stresses task-mastery and can be a perfect medium for encouraging persistent motivated behaviours in physical education and sports.

- **Learning team-work, learning goal setting and developing the ability to focus**

Gymnastics shares with other sport the opportunity to learn about teamwork, sportsmanship, fair play, dedication, and so forth. Many would suggest that gymnastics is an individual participant sport and, superficially, it is. Because of the great challenge of learning gymnastics skills, much intra-team encouragement is demanded and the best of teamwork can be developed.

Goal setting involves a set of skills that are critical to performance success in gymnastics and other aspects of life. Because gymnastics has so many and varied skills to master, gymnastic participation is a wonderful laboratory for children to learn and practice goal setting. Due to the complex skill performances, gymnastics demands and develops a high level of on-task focus. The —moment-to-moment need to physically generate the skill performance cannot be diluted. Finishing a gymnastics performance is an —either-or experience battling against the effects of gravity-space-time. While lapses in task focus in many other sports can result in simple & inconsequential —hit or miss performance, lapses in gymnastics performance give immediate highly meaningful feedback as —gravity-space-time cannot be ignored. Gymnasts quickly learn that it is necessary and, over time, more enjoyable to be in the —here and now and fully focused on task. This ability to focus with laser-like power is a very advantageous life skill that all participants in gymnastics can learn.

DISCUSSION

Overall, participation in gymnastics must be recommended as a positive foundational activity for school-aged children. Studied benefits of participation in gymnastics are: enhanced development of most of the fundamental motor patterns, enhanced flexibility, enhanced general strength and postural control, enhanced balance, enhanced anaerobic endurance, unique long-term bone forming and strengthening advantages, potential for enhanced cognitive benefits, enhanced Task Mastery orientations, potential for enhanced skill goal setting, and the ability to focus on tasks. Even so, benefits of participation should be assessed alongside the inherent risks of participation.

CONCLUSION

As in many things, it is the case of moderated gymnastic participation (under 20 hours per week) where the higher level and greatest number of benefits for children are realized. In such contexts, it would appear that package of benefits offered by gymnastics participation enriches and physically educates the lives of its participants in ways that are difficult to achieve through most other activities and sports.