

Age: 9 - 11 years (females)

10 - 12 years (males)

Participants with an intellectual disability can enter at any age (with or without support person)

Gymnasts may remain in this stage past the age of 11/12

4 SPECIALIZATION IN A GYM DISCIPLINE

This stage is one of the most important periods of motor development and is a window of accelerated adaptation to skill training. All key gymnastics skills should be well-established during this stage and discipline-specific skills will be developed.

Those who continue to do gymnastics at this age have usually developed a strong love and enjoyment of the sport, and have chosen to **specialize** in gymnastics as their primary activity. The number of other extra-curricular activities will likely decrease so the participant can specialize in gymnastics. Participation may be at an advanced recreational, demonstration or competitive level, but basic skills are well-established and there is a long-term commitment to the sport. Fun is still important, and it takes on a different meaning as training becomes more structured and skill-oriented. Skills are challenging and the fun of gymnastics is found in achieving a new skill, working with a group of athletes and friends, and striving to do one's best. In this stage, gymnasts will be guided into the most appropriate program and discipline.

Some early-maturing gymnasts may begin the growth spurt toward the end of this stage. Gymnasts should be closely monitored to identify when the growth spurt begins.

What qualities will be developed in this stage?

- This is an important time for development of complex gymnastics skills. MAG and WAG athletes should train on all events. RG athletes should train with all apparatus
- Physical preparation - strength, endurance and flexibility - must accompany skill training (prepare the body to advance the skill). Pay particular attention to flexibility after the onset of the growth spurt. Injury prevention and management become even more important as intensity and volume of training increase
- Spatial orientation development must be emphasized as perceptual judgement skills are developing in this stage. Use trampoline for training spatial orientation
- Continue to develop speed through specific activities that focus on agility, quickness and change of direction
- Include ballet and creative expression development in training
- Ensure that training is enjoyable for all. Encourage social interaction and activities with the gymnasts, as well as participation in activities outside of gymnastics
- Cognitive development: concentration, communication, problem-solving, decision-making
- Psycho/socio development: desire to be active, dedication, commitment to train
- Gymnasts must learn strategies for stress management, coping with commitment and life balance, and strategies for competition/performance (e.g. planning, goal setting, concentration, imagery and relaxation skills)
- Gym rules relating to safety and accepted social behaviour need to be reinforced. The participant learns to accept consequences of behaviour
- Sport ethics should be considered as part of the training program

What does NOT belong in the gymnastics program?

- Elements on knees should be taught and used with caution, particularly in RG programs
- Repetitive lower back hyperextension skills
- Inflexible teaching approaches that do not consider the individual developmental needs of each gymnast
- Overtraining and under-recovery; gymnasts must be monitored, and training programs adjusted to address individual needs
- Overstress and lack of balance in life due to excessive training demands

Performance Qualities

- All gymnasts will benefit from participation in a variety of activities including club Gymfests, Provincial and National Gymnaestrada or recreational meets.
- Competitive athletes will also participate in competitions at the provincial, interprovincial and national levels.
- Gymnasts are becoming more comfortable with competition. The goal of competition is focused on the performance of clean, consistent skills/routines, not on results. This is an important time for gymnasts to develop strategies for competition. It is equally important that parents and coaches emphasize “doing your best routines” rather than rankings and competition results.

Amount of Time in Gymnastics

- Recreational and performance gymnasts: two to three training sessions per week, up to 3 hours per session
- Competitive MAG and WAG gymnasts: four or five training sessions per week, up to 3.5 hours per session; maximum 16 hours per week for a national level gymnast
- Competitive RG gymnasts: four or five training sessions per week, 3 to 3.5 hours per session; maximum 16 hours per week for a national level gymnast (including ballet preparation)

- AG and TG gymnasts: 9 to 12 hours per week
- Number of weeks per year: up to 45-48
- Single or double peak periodization, based on provincial or national championships; 4-6 competitions per year.
- Involvement in dance programs
- Encourage ongoing participation in at least one other complementary sport/activity (e.g. dance, aerial sports, other artistic sports)

Role of Parents

- Parental involvement increases and parents develop a growing interest in the child’s sport.
- Parents are expected to volunteer at activities and with club organization. They become spectators at events and competitions, and gain technical knowledge. Some parents may take judging courses.
- Parents may commit a great deal of time to their child’s sport, which involves sacrificing their own leisure time
- Ensure ongoing communication between parents, coach and gymnast. Parents must trust the coach, talk and provide advice to the gymnast and intervene only when necessary.
- Parents must provide a “positive push”, rather than pressuring the gymnast
- Parents continue to ensure that there is a balance of gym with school and non-sport activities, and that gymnasts are properly nourished and rested
- Parents should be prepared to transport participants to activities, to purchase equipment and clothing, and to assume increased costs of training/competition

Monitoring

- Fitness levels
- Body alignment and symmetrical development of flexibility and strength
- Social skills
- Emotional and behavioural stabilities
- Cognitive abilities
- Physical and technical abilities

- Height monitored every 3 months. Measurements should include standing height, sitting height and arm span (as per standardized protocol – see Appendix)
- Flexibility
- Recovery and Regeneration

Events and Activities

- Maintain a varied combination of events, performances and competitions as in Learning to Train stage
- Support, assist and mentor gymnasts in class and event/competitive activities
- Selection of competitive and performance events reflects the specific needs of the gymnast
- Competitions are used for ability and performance measurement and are not driven by results

Programs for this stage: Provincial Competitive programs (MAG, WAG CPP, RG, TG)

GCG Pre Novice program (WAG, RG)

GCG Novice program (WAG, RG, TG)

GCG Age Group development programs for national and high performance stream (MAG)

GCG WAG Physical Ability Program

Programs provided through Special Olympics Canada

Type of Coach: Certified Foundations to Gymnastics + appropriate specialization

Certified Competition-Introduction coach
(Up to provincial stream competitive)

Certified Competition – Development coach
(provincial stream and above)

Special Olympics Canada competition coach

*“I want to be innovative,
I want the kids to enjoy every
day, I want the process to be more
important than the end result;
enjoying everything in the gym is
far more important than just
trying to get to the top”*

– Kelly Manjak
Coach of Kyle Shewfelt, 2004
Olympic Floor Gold Medallist

