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ISSUE 1

KENSINGTON

GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE

Understanding
children's movement
in a city like London



LONDON'S FAMILY GYMNASTICS GUIDE

KENSINGTON GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE

London's Family Gymnastics Guide

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine is an independent educational publication created in London for families, gymnasts, and anyone interested in understanding gymnastics more clearly.

*This magazine exists to explain — not to persuade.
To inform — not to promote.*

To bring clarity to a sport that is widely admired, often misunderstood, and rarely explained in calm, accessible language.

Each issue explores gymnastics through science, experience, and culture — from children's movement and development, to anatomy, food, lifelong participation, and the world's most important gymnastics events.

Written from London and shaped by life in a global city, this publication reflects a simple belief: movement matters most when it is understood.

Editor

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Editor's Letter

Welcome to the first issue of Kensington Gymnastics Magazine.

This magazine was created with a simple idea: to make gymnastics clearer, calmer, and more understandable for families living in London.

Over the years, I have worked with children, parents, and coaches across different contexts — as a gymnast, a researcher, and an educator. One pattern has remained consistent. Families care deeply about their children's movement and wellbeing, yet are often surrounded by mixed messages, assumptions, and pressure. Gymnastics, in particular, is widely admired, frequently misunderstood, and rarely explained in a way that feels accessible.

This magazine exists to change that.

Rather than telling families what to do, our aim is to explain how gymnastics works — scientifically, culturally, and practically — so decisions can be made with confidence rather than anxiety. We believe that understanding creates better environments for children: environments where growth is respected, learning is prioritised, and movement remains something positive and sustainable.

London plays a central role in this project. It is the city where I have spent more than half of my adult life, where much of my professional work has taken place, and where families navigate the unique challenges of raising children in a global capital. This magazine is written from London, shaped by London experiences, and intended for families who call this city home.

In this first issue, we explore gymnastics from multiple perspectives — from scientific research and anatomy, to food, lifelong movement, elite sport, and the everyday questions parents ask. These topics may seem diverse, but they are united by a single principle: movement matters most when it is understood.

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine is not a manual, a rulebook, or a marketing tool. It is an educational publication, shaped by evidence, experience, and respect for the complexity of human development. Issue by issue, our goal is to build knowledge carefully and responsibly, without haste.

Thank you for reading, and for taking the time to think more deeply about movement, growth, and gymnastics.

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

Editor, Kensington Gymnastics Magazine

Editorial Manifesto

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine exists to make gymnastics understandable.

Created and written in London, this publication reflects the discipline, tradition, and intellectual confidence of the city it serves. Its purpose is to explain gymnastics clearly, thoughtfully, and responsibly — drawing on science, professional experience, and respect for the people who practise it.

We believe that understanding matters more than instruction, and clarity more than opinion. Gymnastics is complex by nature, and simplification without explanation often leads to confusion rather than confidence. Our role is not to prescribe, but to illuminate.

Where scientific evidence exists, this magazine draws on it carefully and conservatively. Where evidence is evolving, uncertainty is explained honestly rather than ignored. Where experience matters, it is valued — without exaggeration or urgency.

This magazine is written with patience. Knowledge is built gradually, not rushed. Issue by issue, our aim is to support better conversations around movement, development, and lifelong participation in gymnastics.

FEATURE

Why Gymnastics May Support Children's Health in London

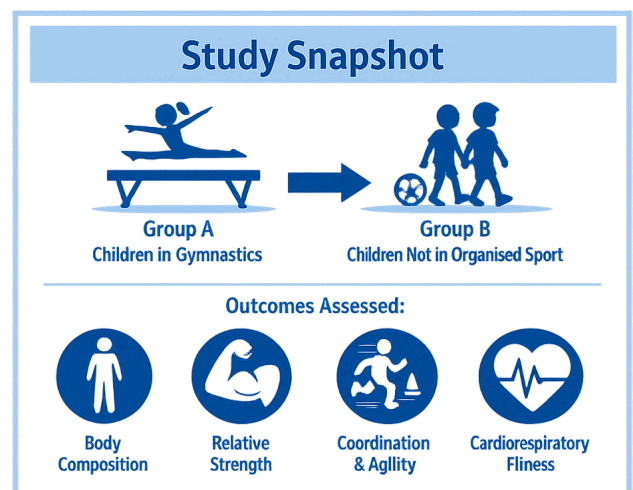
What the science really shows

From London — a city of movement, energy, and constant change — childhood looks very different today than it did even a generation ago. Children grow up surrounded by opportunity, culture, and stimulation, but also by limited space to move freely. Playgrounds are fewer, time outdoors is often shorter, and structured activities increasingly shape how children move, learn, and develop.

As part of my doctoral research in Physical Education, I set out to answer a deceptively simple question: how does regular participation in gymnastics influence the health-related physical fitness of primary school children? A large proportion of the children who participated in this research were training in London gymnastics clubs, making the findings especially relevant for families raising children in this city.

Why this matters

When parents think about gymnastics, they often picture flexibility, handstands, or competition routines. Rarely do they associate gymnastics with broader health markers such as cardiovascular fitness, body composition, or long-term movement development — yet these are precisely the areas where gymnastics quietly exerts its strongest influence.



Study snapshot: Gymnastics group vs non-organised sport group; outcomes assessed.

FEATURE

The research question

Gymnastics is often seen as a sport for talented children — something technical, aesthetic, and sometimes intimidating. But at its core, gymnastics is a structured system of movement education. It develops strength relative to body weight, coordination, balance, speed, flexibility, and spatial awareness — qualities that underpin almost every other form of physical activity.

In my doctoral research, I examined whether children who practise artistic gymnastics demonstrate differences in health-related physical fitness compared with children who do not participate in organised sport. This matters because health-related fitness is not just about sport performance; it is closely linked to children’s physical development and long-term wellbeing.

A large proportion of participants in this study were training in London clubs, which makes the findings particularly relevant for families raising children in a dense, fast-paced city where daily movement can be constrained by space, schedules, and screen time.

What “health-related fitness” includes

Health-related physical fitness commonly includes:

- Body composition
- Muscular strength (relative to body size)
- Cardiorespiratory fitness
- Movement skills such as speed, agility, balance, and coordination

Study design (in brief)

To explore this question, we compared two groups of primary school children: one group practising artistic gymnastics, and a comparison group of children who were not involved in organised sport. Both groups completed the same set of physical fitness assessments under standardised conditions.

The aim was not to “prove” that one sport is superior to all others, but to understand what gymnastics may contribute to children’s health-related fitness — especially in a modern urban environment where opportunities for free movement can be limited.

Study at a glance

Key details of the study design:

- Two groups: gymnastics vs non-organised sport
- Focus: health-related physical fitness
- Outcomes assessed:

body composition • relative strength • agility/coordination • cardiorespiratory fitness



Body Composition



Muscular Strength



Agility & Coordination



Cardiorespiratory Fitness

FEATURE

Who took part in the study

The study examined primary school-aged children, comparing those who regularly practised artistic gymnastics with peers who did not participate in organised sport. The children were drawn from comparable school-age contexts, allowing differences in physical fitness to be explored more clearly. The goal was not to label one group as “better”, but to understand what kind of physical stimulus gymnastics provides during the most important years of development.

Although this research focused on children involved in artistic gymnastics, many of the health-related mechanisms identified — strength relative to body weight, coordination, and movement efficiency — are not exclusive to elite pathways, but emerge from well-structured gymnastics training more broadly.

Participants & comparison (in brief)

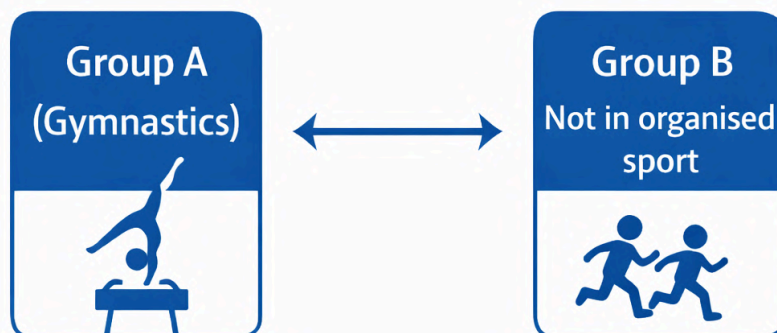
Primary school-aged children

- Group A: regularly practising artistic gymnastics
- Group B: not participating in organised sport
- Similar social and educational environments

What this study can — and can't — tell us

It can help us understand how a structured movement discipline like gymnastics may relate to health-related fitness in primary school years.

It does not mean gymnastics is “superior” to all sport, or that children should specialise early, train excessively, or pursue competition unless they choose to.



Comparing health-related fitness outcomes

FEATURE



What the study found: body composition

One of the most consistent differences between the groups appeared in body composition. Children who practised artistic gymnastics tended to show a leaner profile compared with children who were not involved in organised sport.

This does not mean that body composition should become the goal of childhood sport. However, it does suggest that gymnastics provides a type of physical stimulus that can support healthy development in a modern environment where overall daily movement may be reduced.

In practice, gymnastics combines frequent whole-body movement, repeated strength-to-weight challenges, and coordination demands. Over time, this kind of training can influence how children move and how efficiently they use their bodies — which may help explain the differences observed.

“Gymnastics isn’t just ‘skills’ — it is a repeated full-body stimulus that builds strength relative to body size.”

What this may mean for families

If a child is not getting much free movement day-to-day, a well-structured gymnastics class can provide a concentrated dose of whole-body activity: climbing, supporting, balancing, and moving through space in varied ways.

What it does not mean

- That children should diet, “cut weight”, or pursue thinness
- That gymnastics should be excessive or high-pressure
- That body composition is the main measure of a child’s health or success



What the study found: relative strength

Strength in gymnastics is rarely about how much a child can lift — it is about how well they can control their body in space. In this study, children who practised artistic gymnastics tended to show stronger performance in tests that reflect strength relative to body size.

This makes sense when you consider what gymnastics training involves: repeated supporting, holding, pushing, landing, and stabilising the body — often through full ranges of motion. Over time, these demands can build robust strength foundations without needing heavy external loads.

FEATURE

Why **“relative strength”** matters: it supports safer landings, better posture control, and confidence during new movement challenges.



What the study found: coordination & agility

Another key area where gymnastics children often differ is movement coordination, the ability to organise the body quickly, smoothly, and efficiently. In this research, children practising gymnastics tended to perform better in tasks that reflect agility, speed of movement, and coordination.

For parents, this is often the most visible change. Children who develop coordination early typically look more “athletic” not because they are doing tricks, but because their movement becomes cleaner: they run with better rhythm, jump and land with more control, and adapt more quickly to unfamiliar physical tasks.

What families may notice first

- Improved balance and body control during play
- More confident jumping, landing, and climbing
- Faster learning of new movement patterns (not just gymnastics skills)

Children progress best when training volume is age-appropriate and coaching is qualified.



What the study found: cardiorespiratory fitness

Cardiorespiratory fitness reflects how well the heart, lungs, and muscles work together during sustained activity. In this study, children who practised artistic gymnastics tended to perform better in measures linked to cardiorespiratory fitness compared with children not involved in organised sport.

This may surprise some parents, because gymnastics is often seen as a “strength and skill” sport rather than an endurance activity. However, many gymnastics sessions involve repeated bouts of active movement — running, jumping, climbing, supporting, landing, and moving through space — with relatively short rest periods. Over time, that pattern can contribute to improvements in general fitness.

“Gymnastics can build general fitness — not only skills.”

FEATURE

Summary

Across the outcomes tested, the gymnastics group tended to show advantages in:

- Body composition
- Strength relative to body size
- Coordination & agility
- Cardiorespiratory fitness

For families, the most important takeaway is simple: gymnastics can provide a broad, whole-body movement education that supports healthy development — particularly when daily free movement is limited.

What it does not mean

- That every child should do gymnastics (many sports can be excellent)
- That children should specialise early or train excessively
- That health should be reduced to a single outcome or number

Reference: Kolimechkov, S., Petrov, L., & Alexandrova, A. (2021). *Artistic gymnastics improves biomarkers related to physical fitness and health at primary school age. International Journal of Applied Exercise Physiology*, 10(1), 115–128.



FOUNDATIONS

Gymnastics Anatomy

Understanding the body behind the movement

Mobility • strength • control • safe progressions

Gymnastics is often described as “skills”, but behind every handstand, jump, and landing sits a set of foundations: mobility, strength relative to body size, coordination, and control through full ranges of motion.

In this section, we break those foundations down in simple terms, so parents can understand what gymnastics develops, why it matters for growing bodies, and what “safe progress” actually looks like in a good training environment.

What you’ll learn

- The building blocks: mobility, strength, stability, coordination
- Why shoulder and hip control matter in gymnastics
- What “progressions” look like (and why they reduce risk)
- Common overuse patterns and how good coaching helps prevent them
- How to support training at home (without increasing risk)

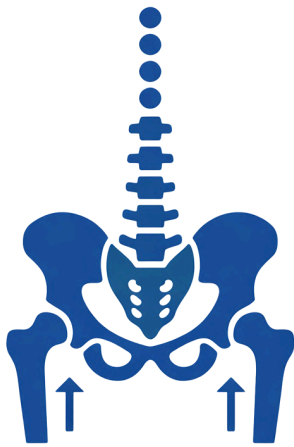
This section is educational and not a substitute for medical advice.

FOUNDATIONS

Safety first (a parent note)

Gymnastics should be taught through age-appropriate progressions, with qualified coaching, appropriate equipment, and a strong focus on movement quality.

If a child has pain, recurring discomfort, or a medical condition, it's best to seek guidance from an appropriate healthcare professional.



Posture supports movement

The posture principle

Posture in gymnastics is not about “standing up straight”. It is about how well a child can organise their body — ribcage, pelvis, shoulders, and head — so movement feels stable and controlled. When posture is well organised, children tend to jump and land more quietly, support their body weight more safely, and learn new skills with fewer compensations. When it is not, the body often “borrows” movement from the wrong places — arching the lower back, collapsing through the shoulders, or losing alignment under load.

Why it matters in gymnastics

Gymnastics involves repeated positions where posture matters: landing from jumps, holding shapes in support, and controlling the body upside down. These are not just “skills”, they are strength and coordination through alignment. A child does not need to be rigid. In fact, good coaching teaches a balance: enough stiffness to stay safe and strong, and enough freedom to move naturally. The goal is movement quality first, then complexity.

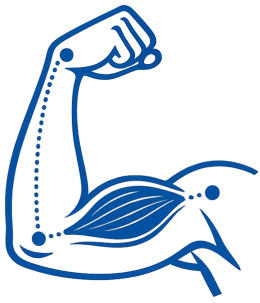
What “good posture” really means

- A ribcage and pelvis that stay reasonably “stacked” during movement
- Shoulders that can support weight without collapsing
- A spine that can stay long under control (not forced)
- The ability to hold basic shapes briefly — without strain

Parent takeaway: what to look for

- Coaches cue body shapes and landing mechanics (not just tricks)
- Children practise simple holds, supports, and controlled landings
- Progressions are used, not rushed jumps to advanced skills
- A child is corrected calmly and positively when alignment breaks down

FOUNDATIONS



MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Biceps (Biceps brachii)

The biceps is the prominent muscle at the front of the upper arm. It crosses both the shoulder and the elbow, which is why it helps with more than just bending the arm.

Most people associate the biceps with “curling”, but in real movement it plays a bigger role: it helps control the elbow under load, assists with stabilising the shoulder, and contributes to turning the forearm (for example, rotating the palm upward). In gymnastics, that combination is important because many actions involve hanging, pulling, and controlled lowering, not just lifting.

In a well-coached programme, children don’t “train biceps” directly. They build it naturally through progressive gymnastics patterns that develop strength relative to body size, alongside coordination and safe joint control.

Where you’ll see biceps work in gymnastics

- Hanging and controlled lowering on bars (grip + elbow control)
- Climbing patterns (rope progressions, frames, and monkey-bar style play)
- Pulling actions that support safe skill learning (e.g., basic bar shapes and transitions)
- Ring and bar basics with appropriate support and progressions
- “Catch and control” moments — when a child supports or steadies themselves through the arms

Common misunderstanding

- The biceps is not mainly about “big muscles”, in gymnastics it’s mostly about control and safe force absorption.
- Stronger arms do not mean children should train heavy weights. Progressions, technique, and appropriate volume matter more.

FOUNDATIONS



MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Triceps (Triceps brachii)

The triceps sits on the back of the upper arm and helps children support safely through straight arms.

The triceps is the large muscle on the back of the upper arm. It crosses the elbow joint and its main job is straightening the arm (elbow extension).

In gymnastics, that matters because many key actions involve supporting bodyweight through straight arms — not just “pushing”, but locking out safely, controlling small bends, and maintaining stable shapes under load.

A useful way to think about it:

- Biceps help you pull and control bending
- Triceps help you push and control straightening

In a well-coached programme, children don’t “train triceps” directly, they develop it naturally through supports, shapes, holds, and progressive weight-bearing tasks.

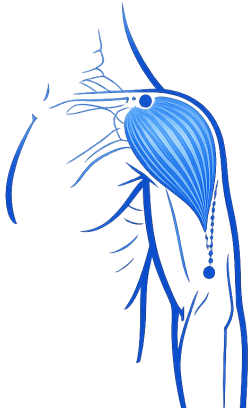
Where you’ll see triceps work in gymnastics

- Straight-arm supports (front support, side support)
- Hand support on floor (bear walks, crab walks, basic handstand shapes against a wall)
- Vault and jump landings with hand support
- Bars and ring basics (support holds, controlled transitions, “pressing away” from the apparatus)
- Push-up progressions (incline push-ups, box push-ups, slow eccentrics — technique first)

Common misunderstanding

- The triceps is not mainly about “big arms” — in gymnastics it’s mostly about safe straight-arm support and control under load.
- “Locked elbows” should never mean forced or painful. Good coaching builds alignment + shoulder stability, not joint strain.
- Stronger pushing does not mean children should do heavy weights. Progressions, technique, and appropriate volume matter more.

FOUNDATIONS



MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Deltoid (Shoulder muscle)

The deltoid is the rounded muscle that caps the top of the shoulder. It helps lift and control the arm in multiple directions — especially raising the arm to the side and forward.

In gymnastics, the deltoid matters because many skills require children to support weight through the arms while keeping the shoulders organised. It doesn't work alone, it partners with the upper back and the rotator cuff, but it's one of the easiest "headline" muscles to understand when parents think about strong, safe shoulders.

A simple way to picture it:

- The deltoid helps the shoulder hold position while the rest of the body moves.
- That's why it shows up in handstands, supports, and controlled landings through the arms.

Where you'll see deltoids work in gymnastics

- Bear walks / crab walks / crawling patterns (shoulder stability while moving)
- Front support & plank shapes (holding shoulders strong and "stacked")
- Handstand progressions (supporting bodyweight through the shoulder line)
- Vault and springboard push-offs (stable shoulder position + controlled force)
- Bars and rings basics (supports, hangs, and shaping drills)
- Cartwheel / bridge progressions (shoulder control through a wide range of motion)

Common misunderstanding

- Shoulder strength is not just "strong arms" — it's shoulder position and control.
- A child can look flexible but still lack shoulder stability; the goal is mobility + control together.
- More repetitions is not always better — good shapes, quality coaching, and gradual progressions reduce risk.

FOUNDATIONS

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

The shoulder “support” system (how arms hold the body safely)

Gymnastics is full of “support” positions — moments where a child’s arms act like strong pillars. This is not about lifting heavy weights. It’s about organising the shoulder, elbow, and wrist so the body can stay stable under load.

In good coaching, support strength is built through short holds, simple shapes, and careful progressions, so children learn control first, then confidence, then complexity.

What “support” looks like in gymnastics

Support is anywhere a child must hold themselves on straight arms or through the shoulders, including:

- Plank and front support shapes
- Box supports (hands on a raised surface)
- Bear and crab patterns
- Bar supports and basic ring supports (age-appropriate)
- Handstand preparation (wall shapes, shoulder shrugs, controlled holds)

These positions teach the body to resist collapsing, and they build the foundations for safer landings, stronger pushing, and better alignment upside down.

How the three muscles work together

These three muscles help children stay stable and safe when supporting weight through the arms.

Deltoid (shoulder control)

The deltoid helps position and stabilise the upper arm at the shoulder. In gymnastics, that matters because the shoulder must stay “set” during supports — not drifting forward, collapsing, or over-arching through the ribs.

You’ll see this in:

- Planks and box supports (keeping the shoulder stable)
- Handstand shapes (controlling the shoulder position overhead)
- Any pushing position where the body stays long and controlled

Triceps (straight-arm support)

The triceps straightens the elbow and helps the arm stay solid under load. In many gymnastics positions, children need active straight arms — not floppy elbows, and not “hanging” into the joints.

You’ll see this in:

- Planks and supports (keeping elbows stable)
- Handstand work (active straight arms)
- Push-up progressions (slow control, not rushing reps)

FOUNDATIONS

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Biceps (control + safe force absorption)

The biceps helps control the elbow under load, especially during hanging, pulling, and controlled lowering. It also contributes to forearm control, which matters in bars, rings, and any grip-based work.

You'll see this in:

- Hanging and controlled lowering on bars
- Climbing patterns and monkey-bar style play
- Pulling actions that support safe skill learning

What good coaching looks like (in supports)

A well-coached class usually includes:

- Short, high-quality holds (instead of long, sloppy ones)
- Clear body-shape cues (ribs, shoulders, hips in alignment)
- Progressions (raised supports → floor supports → more demanding variations)
- Calm corrections when a child collapses or compensates

Over time, children learn that “strong arms” in gymnastics means control through posture, not just effort.

Common misunderstanding

- “Support strength means heavy weights.”

Not for children. In gymnastics, strength is built mainly through bodyweight patterns, posture, and safe progressions.

- “Straight arms means locking out into the joints.”

It should be active straight — with the shoulder supporting and the body organised, not “hanging” into the elbow.

- “If a child struggles, they should just try harder.”

Usually, it means the progression is too big. A good programme adjusts the load, reduces the lever, or raises the surface.

Parent takeaway: what to look for in a class

- Coaches teach shapes and alignment before harder skills
- Children practise simple supports and controlled landings regularly
- Progressions are used (not rushed jumps to advanced skills)
- A child is corrected positively when the shoulder or elbow collapses
- Pain is not ignored, load is reduced and technique is reset

FOUNDATIONS

Food, Growth & Gymnastics

Fuel, development, and balance

Food is one of the most emotionally charged topics in childhood, and one of the most misunderstood, especially once sport enters the picture.

For families whose children practise gymnastics, questions around eating often surface quietly: Is my child eating enough? Are they eating the right things? Should food change on training days? These questions are natural. They reflect care, responsibility, and a desire to support growth.

This section exists to bring calm to that conversation.

Children are not small adults

One of the most important principles in nutrition is also one of the simplest: children are not small adults. Their bodies are not finished systems that simply need maintaining, they are developing systems that need consistent support.

Growth requires energy. Bone development, muscle development, brain development, and hormonal regulation all depend on adequate nourishment. When children are physically active, especially in a sport like gymnastics that demands coordination, strength, and concentration, those needs often increase.

In this context, food is not about optimisation or control. It is about giving the body what it needs to grow, learn, and adapt.



FOUNDATIONS

Food supports learning, not just training

Gymnastics is a learning sport. Children are constantly acquiring new movement patterns, refining coordination, and improving awareness of their bodies in space. That learning doesn't happen only in the gym, it continues through recovery, sleep, and everyday life.

Regular meals and snacks support energy levels, attention, and mood, helping children engage fully with training and school. When intake is inconsistent or insufficient, children may appear tired, irritable, or unfocused. These signs are often misread as a motivation problem, when the body may simply be under-fuelled.

Growth comes before performance

In childhood gymnastics, growth must come before performance. Skills can wait; development cannot.

During rapid growth phases, appetite can fluctuate, coordination may temporarily change, and children can feel awkward or fatigued. These phases are normal but they require patience and support. Steady eating routines help keep energy availability more consistent, supporting physical growth and emotional wellbeing.

The aim is not “perfect eating”. It is **reliable eating**.

Energy, not perfection

Children do not need perfect diets to thrive. They need enough food, eaten regularly, in a relaxed environment.

Gymnastics does not require special foods, superfoods, or rigid rules. What matters most is consistency: meals and snacks that provide energy across the day, particularly when school, commuting, training, and homework compress time.

In a city like London, that practicality matters. A simple plan beats a complicated one.

Appetite and rhythm

Children's appetite naturally varies. Training days may increase hunger; rest days may not. Growth spurts can shift eating patterns quickly.

Rather than trying to control normal fluctuations, it is more helpful to look at patterns over time. A child who eats regularly, grows steadily, and has energy to move is usually doing well.

Trusting appetite does not mean abandoning structure. It means offering food consistently, and letting children respond to hunger and fullness within that structure.



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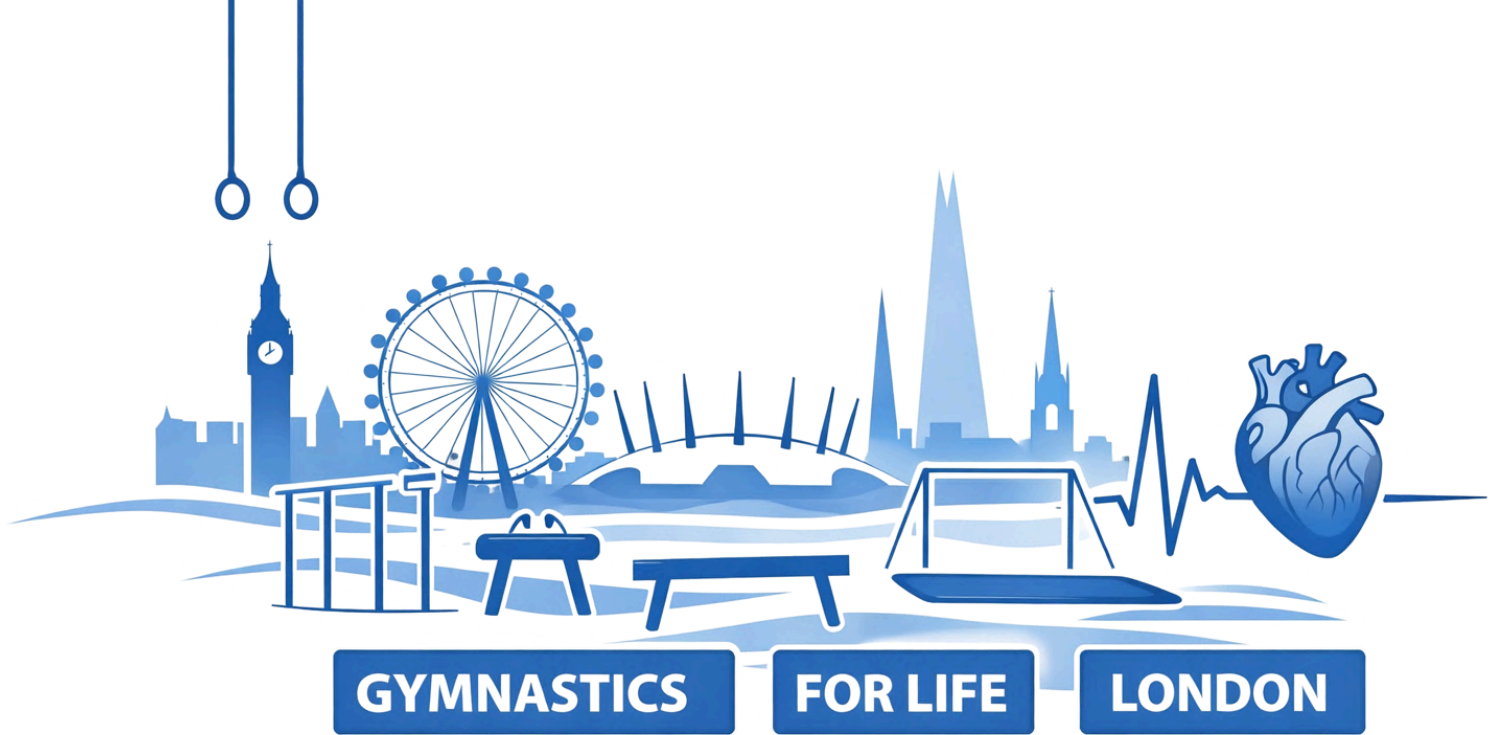
A calm message for families

Food should support a child's relationship with movement, not complicate it.

For children who practise gymnastics, eating well usually means: eating enough, eating regularly, and eating without fear. Growth, learning, and enjoyment matter more than any short-term outcome.

In future issues, we'll return to nutrition carefully and responsibly. For now, the key message is simple:

Growing bodies need fuel, and movement flourishes when it is supported, not restricted.



GYMNASTICS FOR LIFE

Masters & Lifelong Movement

Why gymnastics does not end with childhood

Gymnastics is often seen as a childhood sport, something that begins early and, for many, ends just as early. Yet movement does not stop being important once childhood ends. From a health and science perspective, the need for structured, well-designed physical activity becomes even more critical as we grow older.

This section is dedicated to lifelong gymnastics, and to a group of athletes who are still not widely understood or consistently recognised: masters athletes.

In this issue, we introduce what masters gymnastics means, why it matters, and how it fits modern adult life, especially in London.

A personal perspective

This topic is particularly close to my own heart. I am myself a masters athlete, and my experience as both a researcher and a participant has shaped how I understand the value of continued movement beyond childhood.

GYMNASTICS FOR LIFE

Training as an adult is not about replicating what was done at a younger age. It is about listening to the body, respecting recovery, and finding intelligent ways to remain strong, mobile, and capable. The science of ageing does not argue against movement, it argues for better movement.

What does “masters athlete” mean?

In sport and in the scientific literature, a masters athlete is typically someone who continues to train and compete beyond early adulthood, often from around age 30–35 onwards (the exact cut-off varies by sport and organisation). In gymnastics, the principle is simple:

Masters athletes are adults who pursue sport with commitment, progression, and purpose later in life.

Veterans vs Masters (a small language note)

In the UK, the term veterans has historically been used in some sports traditions and competition contexts. Increasingly, masters is preferred internationally because it highlights experience, longevity, and age-group participation, without implying “past your best”.

Why this matters in London

London is a city that demands physical resilience. Long working hours, commuting, and sedentary routines place increasing strain on the body over time. For many adults, structured movement disappears from daily life just as its benefits become most needed.

Masters gymnastics, whether practised formally or informally, offers an alternative narrative: learning, adaptation, and physical growth do not have an expiry date. With appropriate guidance, gymnastics can remain a source of challenge, enjoyment, and health well into later adulthood.

Why movement belongs to every age

After childhood, the goal of training changes, but the value of gymnastics often increases. For adults, progress is less about learning “harder tricks” and more about building movement capacity: strength relative to bodyweight, joint control, balance, mobility, and confidence in everyday movement.

Adult participation also looks different from children’s pathways. Some adults are beginners starting for the first time; others return after a long break; and some train systematically for years, including competition. The key point is that adult gymnastics is not a single “type”, it’s a spectrum, shaped by goals, experience, recovery, and time available.

GYMNASTICS FOR LIFE

Why gymnastics makes sense for adults

Gymnastics is fundamentally a movement education. It develops:

- Strength relative to bodyweight
- Joint control + alignment
- Balance, coordination, and spatial awareness
- Mobility with stability

These are not “childhood-only” qualities. They are the ingredients that support healthy ageing, confidence in daily movement, and long-term independence — especially in modern city life.

Key message: Gymnastics doesn't end — it evolves.

For adults, progress is less about difficulty and more about movement quality: strength relative to bodyweight, joint control, balance, mobility, and confidence that carries into everyday life.

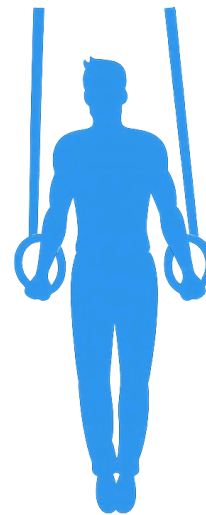
This is not nostalgia — it's a modern approach to staying capable for decades.

Masters gymnastics is a continuum, not a category

Lifelong gymnastics does not mean everyone needs to compete. It means adults can stay connected to the sport through scaled, intelligent training — where impact is managed, difficulty is adapted, and progress is measured as movement quality and capacity, not just skills.

Looking ahead

In future issues, this section will cover practical masters training: how to progress safely, build strength without overload, protect joints, and recover well. We'll also explore mobility, body composition, and the science of ageing — with clear principles adults can apply in real life.





LONDON & THE WORLD

Gymnastics in London

Movement, pathways, and opportunity in a global city

London does not need to be convinced to value excellence. It is a city built on craft: in music, architecture, theatre, science, and sport. Yet when it comes to children's movement, modern city life can quietly work against us. Space is limited, time is pressured, and many families have to plan movement rather than stumble into it.

Gymnastics fits London unusually well.

It is a sport that can be delivered year-round, in compact spaces, and in structured sessions that teach children to move with control. But more than that, it offers something increasingly rare in a busy city: physical literacy: the foundations of strength, balance, coordination, and confidence that support every other sport and, ultimately, long-term health.



LONDON & THE WORLD

A sport with many disciplines — one shared foundation

When people say “gymnastics”, they often mean artistic gymnastics. In reality, gymnastics is a family of disciplines with different traditions, rules, and cultures. In a city like London, families may encounter many forms: artistic and rhythmic, trampoline, acrobatic, and Gymnastics for All.

The disciplines may look different, but the foundation is shared: *learning how to control the body in space*.

For families, it helps to think of gymnastics not as a single pathway, but as a movement education, something that can be experienced recreationally, competitively, or simply as a lifelong practice.

Recreational gymnastics in a world of pathways

In many sports, public attention gravitates toward elite performance. Gymnastics is no exception. Yet the truth is that the largest part of gymnastics in any city is not elite, it is recreational.

Recreational gymnastics is where most children begin. It is where movement confidence is formed. It is where the majority of families engage with the sport, and where the widest public-health benefit is created.

In London, recreational gymnastics deserves to be recognised as more than a “starter phase”. It is the core of the ecosystem, the place where good coaching, safe progression, and joyful learning matter most.

Competition in London — more varied than many families realise

London’s gymnastics calendar includes a wide range of events. Some competitions sit clearly within performance pathways; others are designed to encourage participation, learning, and community.

For many families, competitions are the first introduction to judging, routines, and the emotional weight of performance. Approached well, competitions can teach resilience, composure, and self-awareness. Misunderstood, they can create pressure that doesn’t belong in childhood sport.

One goal of this magazine is to help London families understand competition culture with clarity, so events become experiences of growth rather than sources of confusion.

Adult and masters gymnastics — a hidden opportunity

London is filled with adults who once moved well, and who now sit for long hours, commute, and live in bodies that gradually become stiffer, weaker, and less confident. This is not a personal failing. It is an urban reality.

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Adult gymnastics exists here, and so does a growing culture of adults returning to the sport or trying it for the first time. Within that broad adult community, there is also a smaller group whose approach is more systematic: adults who train seriously over time — masters athletes.

What makes London special is that it contains both: beginners seeking a joyful re-entry into movement, and committed adults seeking long-term development. The potential is enormous, not only for sport, but for public health.

A London standard for gymnastics education

London is a great city not because it claims to be, but because it continuously builds institutions, ideas, communities. Gymnastics in London deserves that same standard of thoughtful development.

This magazine will not attempt to replace governing bodies or speak on behalf of the sport. But it will do something cities thrive on: education.

Issue by issue, we will raise the level of understanding around gymnastics — the science, the culture, the rules, the pathways, and the long-term meaning of the sport. We will also map the landscape of gymnastics in London: how disciplines differ, how competitions work, and what “good coaching” looks like across ages and goals.

If more London families understand gymnastics more clearly, everyone wins: children move better, parents worry less, coaches communicate more effectively, and gymnastics becomes what it has always had the potential to be — a lifelong foundation for health and human development.

Key message: In a city that limits space and time, gymnastics builds physical literacy that supports every sport and long-term health.

Welcome to gymnastics in London.

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The World of Gymnastics

World Championships, Olympic dreams, and the global stage

There are moments in sport that do more than crown champions. They change the way people see what is possible, and sometimes, the direction their lives take.

In gymnastics, those moments often unfold on the biggest stages: the World Championships and the Olympic Games. These events represent the highest expression of the sport, where years, sometimes decades of work are distilled into a few minutes of movement. They are not simply competitions; they are cultural landmarks, watched by millions and remembered for generations.



When gymnastics meets the world

In 2009, London hosted the World Artistic Gymnastics Championships at the O2 Arena. For the city, it was a major sporting event. For many young gymnasts watching from the stands or from home, it was something more: a first real encounter with gymnastics as a global language.

That championship marked my first visit to London.

I arrived as a gymnast, a spectator, and a young person shaped deeply by the sport. What I encountered was not only elite performance, but a powerful meeting of gymnastics and place — a world-class sport unfolding inside a city that seemed to breathe culture, ambition, and history.

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That year, Bulgarian gymnast Jordan Jovchev — one of the great figures of men’s gymnastics — won silver on rings. Watching an athlete from my own country stand on a world podium in London was profoundly moving. It made the sport feel larger than results, larger than nationality, and larger than any single competition.

Around that period, I also had the opportunity to compete alongside Jordan at national level in Bulgaria, both before and after the World Championships. But the spark (the moment when gymnastics became inseparable from the idea of London) was lit there, in 2009.

Why the Olympic Games still matter

Every four years, the Olympic Games bring gymnastics into homes that may never otherwise encounter the sport. Children see movements that seem impossible. Families gather around screens. Names, routines, and moments become shared references.



For many young gymnasts, the Olympics are the first time they realise something important: their sport belongs to the world. That fascination is natural. The Olympics have always shaped dreams. The role of adults is not to extinguish those dreams, but to guide them, to place them within a bigger picture of development, patience, and reality.

Elite gymnasts are not defined by a single routine or a single competition. They are shaped by years of training, setbacks, injuries, recovery, and persistence. What we see on the world stage is the visible tip of a much deeper journey.

Inspiration without illusion

One of the responsibilities of this magazine is to help families interpret what they see at the highest level of the sport.

World Championships and Olympic routines are not templates for childhood training. They are expressions of what becomes possible at the far end of a pathway — shaped by exceptional circumstances, long preparation, and unique individuals.

Yet their value is real.

They inspire curiosity. They give meaning to the hours spent learning fundamentals. They remind us that movement, refined with care and discipline, can become something profoundly human.

LONDON & THE WORLD

A world that connects back to London

London's place in the world of gymnastics is not accidental. As a global city, it attracts people, ideas, and events that shape how sport is experienced and understood. Encounters with gymnastics at the highest level — through the Olympics, World Championships, European competitions, and international tours — often leave a lasting imprint.

This section of the magazine will follow the world of gymnastics as it unfolds — not as breaking news, but as thoughtful reflection. We will explore major competitions, influential athletes, and the evolving culture of the sport, always with an eye on what these moments mean for families, gymnasts, and lifelong movement.

For some, watching gymnastics on the world stage will remain a moment of inspiration.

For others, it may quietly shape a path they could never have predicted.

Sometimes, a competition is not just a competition.

Sometimes, it is the beginning of a story.

Key message: The world stage inspires — but it is not a training plan. What you see at Worlds or the Olympics is the far end of a long pathway. For children, the goal is not to copy routines, but to build fundamentals with patience and excellent coaching.



UNDERSTANDING THE SPORT

The Language of Gymnastics

Skills, scores, and what they really mean

Gymnastics has its own language.

For families new to the sport, that language can feel confusing, sometimes even intimidating. Terms appear in classes, reports, competitions, and conversations, often without explanation. Parents hear words their children repeat — levels, skills, execution, difficulty — and are expected to understand what they mean.

This section exists to translate the language of gymnastics into clear, everyday understanding.

Not to simplify the sport, but to make it accessible.

Why gymnastics language feels complicated

At the highest level, gymnastics is governed internationally by the Code of Points, published by the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG). It defines how skills are named, grouped, valued, and judged. It is precise and technical, written primarily for judges, coaches, and officials.

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National bodies, including British Gymnastics, interpret and apply this framework within their own systems. Over time, this creates layers of terminology that make perfect sense inside the sport, but not always to families watching from the outside.

The result is a gap between what gymnastics is and how it is explained.

Skill, element, movement — what's the difference?

In everyday language, a “skill” usually means something a person can do.

In gymnastics, a skill (often called an element) refers to a defined movement recognised within the rules of the sport. A cartwheel, handstand, or forward roll may look simple, but within gymnastics they are structured movements with clear expectations about body position, control, and execution.

Understanding this helps families see that gymnastics is not about collecting tricks.

It is about learning movements to a standard — safely, consistently, and with control.

Difficulty and execution — two sides of the same coin

In competitive gymnastics, performances are evaluated through two broad lenses: difficulty and execution.

- Difficulty refers to what is performed — the complexity of the skills and how they are connected.
- Execution refers to how those skills are performed — with control, accuracy, and quality of movement.

For parents, one of the most important points to know is this: higher difficulty does not automatically mean better gymnastics. Especially in childhood, execution — clean movement, posture, and control — is often far more valuable than attempting harder skills too early.

Levels, pathways, and progression

Families often hear the word “level” used in different ways. Sometimes it refers to competition categories, sometimes to class groupings, and sometimes simply to a coach’s internal structure.

There is no single universal meaning of “level” in gymnastics. What matters more than the label is progression — whether a child is learning safely, building confidence, and developing physical literacy over time.

Progression in gymnastics is rarely linear. Children move forward at different rates, pause, revisit skills, and grow into movements as their bodies and understanding change.



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Judging — more than just scores

Judging can feel mysterious. Scores appear quickly, numbers are added, and results are announced with little explanation.

At its core, judging is a structured attempt to evaluate movement quality. Judges are trained to observe body alignment, control, rhythm, precision, and overall performance — not just whether a skill was completed.

Understanding this helps families see competitions less as verdicts, and more as snapshots of development at a particular moment in time.

A shared language for families and gymnasts

When parents understand the language of gymnastics, conversations change. Questions become calmer, expectations more realistic, and support more meaningful.

Children benefit when the adults around them understand not only what they are doing in gymnastics, but why it matters.

This section will grow with each issue — gradually building a shared language that supports learning, enjoyment, and long-term participation in the sport.

Understanding gymnastics language is not about becoming an expert.

It is about feeling included in a sport that rewards patience, care, and thoughtful movement.



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Questions We're Asked

Clear answers for families

Families often ask similar questions when their children begin gymnastics. Some are practical, others emotional, and many sit quietly in the background without ever being voiced. This section brings together the questions we hear most often and answers them with clarity, not reassurance alone.

Is my child too young to start gymnastics?

Many children can begin a beginner gymnastics programme around ages 3–5, once they are ready to explore movement in a structured environment. At this stage, gymnastics isn't about performance, it's about learning to move, listen, coordinate, and enjoy physical activity.

Readiness matters more than age. Curiosity, basic attention, and comfort joining a group are often better indicators than a number on a birth certificate.

Does gymnastics put too much pressure on children?

Gymnastics itself doesn't create pressure — expectations do.

When delivered well, gymnastics can teach patience, body awareness, and resilience. Pressure usually appears when outcomes are prioritised over process, or when adult expectations move ahead of a child's physical and emotional readiness.

Strong environments respect development. They focus on learning rather than rushing, and on consistency rather than comparison.

How many hours a week should my child train?

There is no single correct answer. Training time depends on a child's age, maturity, goals, and overall lifestyle.



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In the early years, quality matters far more than quantity. One or two well-structured sessions can be more valuable than long hours repeating movements without purpose. As children grow, training can increase gradually — but ideally in balance with school demands, rest, and time to simply play.

Should my child compete?

Competition is not an obligation. It is one possible experience within gymnastics.

For some children, competitions provide motivation, focus, and enjoyment. For others, they may be unnecessary — or even unwelcome. Both responses are valid.

The most important question is not whether a child competes, but how competition is framed. When presented as part of learning rather than a measure of worth, it can become a positive experience.

Is gymnastics safe?

All physical activity carries some risk. Gymnastics is a safe sport when taught responsibly — with appropriate progression, qualified coaching, good supervision, and an environment that prioritises technique over speed.

Injuries are more likely when children are rushed into skills before they are physically prepared.

A well-run programme builds strength, control, and confidence step by step.

Will gymnastics make my child too muscular or too flexible?

Children's bodies adapt to movement in balanced ways. In childhood, gymnastics typically develops strength relative to bodyweight, flexibility within healthy ranges, and coordination alongside body awareness.

Concerns about children becoming “too muscular” or “too flexible” often reflect adult misconceptions more than typical developmental outcomes.

What if my child loses interest?

Losing interest isn't failure. It's information.

Children's interests evolve, and movement experiences still contribute to development even when they're temporary. The qualities gymnastics builds — balance, strength, coordination, confidence — often transfer to other sports and activities.

A positive experience in gymnastics can leave children better prepared for whatever comes next.

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How can I best support my child?

The most valuable support parents can offer is calm curiosity.

Ask what they enjoyed, what felt difficult, and what they're learning — rather than focusing on results or comparisons. Celebrate effort, patience, and persistence.

When adults understand what gymnastics is really building, children feel safer exploring it.

Key message: Gymnastics works best when progress is the goal — not pressure.

Look for steady learning, good coaching, and a child who feels confident coming back next week.



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Gymnastics Myths

Separating evidence from assumption

Myth Busting

Gymnastics carries myths the way London carries stories, passed along quickly, repeated confidently, and rarely checked. Some myths are harmless. Others influence decisions, shape expectations, and affect how children feel about their bodies and abilities.

In this section, we take a few common beliefs and replace them with something better: clarity.

Myth 1: “Gymnastics stunts children’s growth.”

Reality: The evidence doesn’t support a simple yes or no.

Studies in elite training environments have reported that very high training loads during puberty may be associated with differences in growth patterns in some gymnasts. However, broader reviews do not support the idea that gymnastics automatically or permanently

reduces adult height as a general rule.

What is often missed in family conversations is that many successful gymnasts are naturally smaller and lighter before intense training begins — selection and body type can influence what we observe.

London takeaway: Instead of fixating on height, focus on what matters for healthy development: sensible progression, sufficient sleep, good nutrition, and an environment that treats children as developing humans — not projects.

Myth 2: “Gymnastics is too dangerous — it’s not worth it.”

Reality: Gymnastics is demanding and injuries do occur — but risk is not the same as inevitability.

Injury risk is shaped heavily by how training is delivered: the quality of

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progressions, how fatigue is managed, whether technique is prioritised over speed, and whether coaching and equipment match the gymnast's readiness. When taught responsibly, gymnastics can build strength, coordination, and body awareness — qualities that support safer movement across sport and daily life.

London takeaway: A better question than “Is gymnastics safe?” is: “Is this environment well-run?” Good programmes build control first and difficulty later.

Myth 3: “If my child is talented, they must specialise early.”

Reality: Early specialisation is not a guarantee of long-term success, and it carries recognised risks — especially overuse injury, burnout, and early drop-out.

Children benefit from a broad movement “diet”. Gymnastics can be an extraordinary foundation, but healthy development still needs variety: play, rest, and experiences beyond a single sport identity.

London takeaway: In a city where schedules can become intense early, protecting a child's enjoyment matters. The strongest long-term athletes are rarely built by pressure.

Myth 4: “Flexibility prevents injuries — the more, the better.”

Reality: Flexibility is useful, but it is not a shield.

Stretching alone has not consistently been shown to prevent injuries. In gymnastics, the goal is not maximum flexibility at all costs, but the right balance between mobility and stability — range of motion that can be controlled.

London takeaway: A very flexible child still needs strength and coordination to control that range. Beautiful lines come from control, not forcing.

Myth 5: “More training hours always means faster progress.”

Reality: More hours can increase fatigue — and fatigue can hide the very quality gymnastics depends on.

In childhood gymnastics, progress is often limited not by effort, but by readiness: growth, coordination, attention, recovery, and confidence. More hours only help when they are matched by smart structure, sufficient rest, and the right technical focus.

London takeaway: In a busy city, time is precious. A smaller number of high-quality sessions can outperform a larger number of rushed ones.



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Myths thrive when understanding is missing. One of the quiet advantages of learning gymnastics well — in London or anywhere — is learning to replace assumptions with knowledge.

Closing Reflection

Movement, understanding, and London

London rarely stands still. Life here moves quickly — school runs, packed diaries, long commutes, full calendars. Children grow up surrounded by opportunity, culture, and ambition. But in a city built for speed, one thing can quietly disappear: the simple, steady practice of learning to move well.

That is what gymnastics protects.

At its best, gymnastics is not a performance plan. It is movement education — strength, balance, coordination, posture, body awareness, confidence. The kind of foundation that supports every sport, and more importantly, supports long-term health.

Across this issue we explored the sport from multiple angles: physical development, anatomy, nutrition, recovery, lifelong training, the global stage, and the questions families ask at the beginning of the journey. Each chapter stands alone — but together they point to one clear idea:

When families understand gymnastics, the experience becomes calmer, safer, and more meaningful.

Understanding lowers pressure. It helps parents recognise good coaching. It makes progression feel logical instead of rushed. It reframes competitions as learning experiences, not verdicts. And it gives children something rare: the chance to build confidence in their bodies without feeling they must “keep up.”

This magazine was created for London families who want clarity — not noise.
Confidence — not comparison. A framework — not a frenzy.

As you close this first issue, we invite you to see gymnastics not as a destination, but as a lifelong companion. A foundation in childhood. A stabiliser in adolescence. A return point in adulthood. And for many, a practice that continues far beyond the years most people assume it ends.

Going forward, Kensington Gymnastics Magazine will be published every two months, giving us the space to research properly, write thoughtfully, and keep each issue genuinely useful for families.

In the next issue, we'll go deeper: clearer pathways, smarter training principles, and more practical guidance for London families who want to do this well, not just do it more.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for building strong foundations.

See you in the next issue of Kensington Gymnastics Magazine.



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Dr Stefan Kolimechkov is a London-based sports scientist and gymnastics coach whose work brings together long-term coaching experience and scientific research. He founded Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy to offer a boutique programme built on structured progression, careful technique, and evidence-informed teaching — helping children learn not only skills, but how to move well, safely, and confidently for life.

Why this magazine exists

Gymnastics can feel complex from the outside — full of terminology, pathways, and opinions. This magazine exists to bring clarity: the science, the culture, the rules, and the real-world decisions families face, written in a calm, practical way for London parents and gymnasts.

Selected credentials

- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Physical Education (research on children’s physical development and nutrition in gymnastics).
- Over 20 years of coaching experience, working with children, adults, and families across Bulgaria and the UK.
- British Gymnastics Level 3 coaching qualification (Men’s Artistic) (awarded 2018).
- Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) for teaching in schools in England (awarded 2014).
- Active Masters gymnast, continuing to train and compete, bringing lived understanding of progression, recovery, and long-term development.

Professional standards

Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy operates within recognised professional and safeguarding frameworks, informed by formal training and verified qualifications. Professional memberships listed include MCIMSPA (Chartered), ECSS Fellow, and ACSM Member.

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