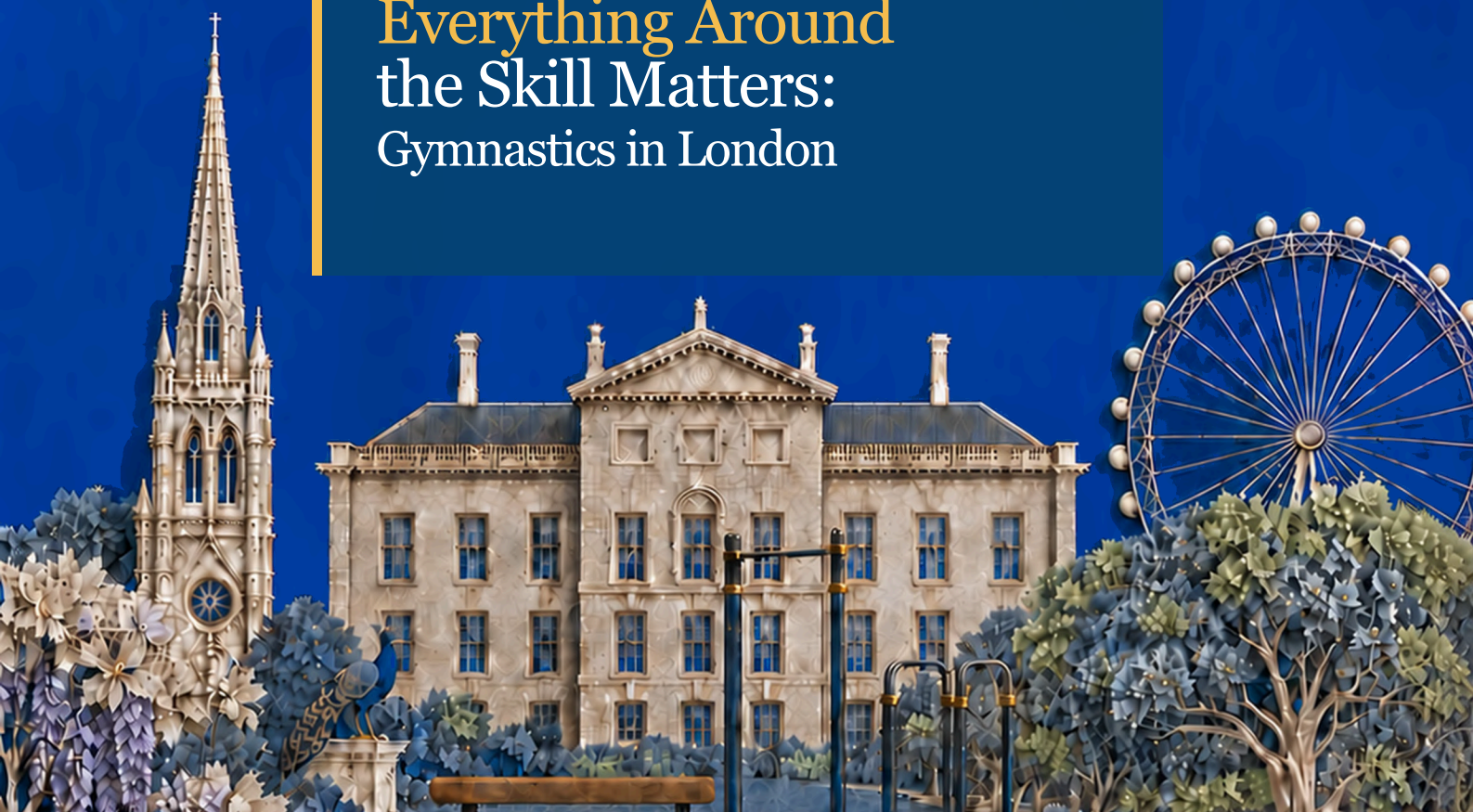


KENSINGTON

GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE



Everything Around
the Skill Matters:
Gymnastics in London



LONDON'S FAMILY GYMNASTICS GUIDE

FOR YOUNGER READERS

HELLO

Chelsea Looks Around the Skill

Your young-reader guide to Issue 4



Hello again! I'm Chelsea.

I am the illustrated gymnast of *Kensington Gymnastics Magazine*. I was created to make important ideas about gymnastics clearer, friendlier and easier for young readers to understand.

WHO CHELSEA IS

Chelsea is an AI-created magazine character—not a real child and not a substitute for your coach. She represents the curiosity, effort and questions of young gymnasts.

Some pages are written mainly for grown-ups. When you see me, I will help bring one of those ideas closer to a gymnast's world.

In Issue 4, we will discover...

How science helps gymnastics ask better questions	How the hip and pelvis help organise movement
Why dietary fat and whole-week recovery matter	How gymnastics can continue through adult life
What London journeys and competitions ask of families	Why men and women use different apparatus programmes
What coaching words mean in practice	How to choose a programme and think calmly about safety

You do not need to understand everything at once. Read with your family, ask questions, and return to the pages that interest you.

CHELSEA'S MESSAGE

"A skill may last for only a moment. Around it are people, practice, food, rest, words and choices that help a gymnast learn."

KENSINGTON GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE

London's Family Gymnastics Guide

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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

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

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FROM THE EDITOR

ISSUE 4
JULY 2026

Editor's Letter

The gymnast is visible. The network of people, knowledge and everyday choices around that gymnast is easier to miss.

At a competition, attention naturally finds the athlete. We notice the held handstand, the strength on rings, the height of a leap and the moment of landing. A routine may last less than a minute. Yet the visible performance is only the final surface of something much larger.

Around every skill are coaches, judges, organisers and families. There are school days, journeys across London, meals eaten between commitments, sleep, recovery and the changing body. There are traditions that shape the sport, words that make teaching possible and scientific questions that remind us how much remains to be understood.

This issue asks readers to look around the skill.

We begin on the scientific stage. Gymnastics is increasingly present in research, sports medicine and professional discussion, and that deserves recognition. But visibility is not the same as certainty. A conference presentation, a clinical observation and a mature body of evidence do not carry identical weight. Our responsibility is to distinguish them clearly while still valuing the questions they allow the sport to ask.

The same care continues through the foundations chapters. The hip and pelvis are not reduced to a single posture or coaching cue; they are presented as a region through which the trunk and legs organise movement. Dietary fat is not treated as something a growing gymnast should fear, but as a normal and necessary part of food, development and an active life. Recovery does not begin when a lesson ends. It is shaped by the whole week—including school, travel, sleep, food, other activities and emotional load.

These subjects belong together because a child never arrives at gymnastics as an isolated body. A gymnast arrives with the day they have already lived. For families in London, that may include a long school day, crowded transport, traffic, sibling arrangements and a late journey home. Understanding that wider context does not lower expectations. It helps adults apply them with greater intelligence.

This issue also became personal. In June, I competed at the Adult Gymnastics British Championships at Lilleshall. I write about the event as an editor and researcher, but also as a gymnast who trained, travelled, waited, competed and stood among a remarkable community. That position gives the chapter a deliberately close lens: not promotion, but a dated record of what adult competitive gymnastics looks and feels like from inside the event.

EDITOR'S LETTER

Continued

The championship also creates an opportunity to examine language. *Adult gymnastics* is a valuable broad term. It welcomes beginners, returning gymnasts and competitors. Within that wider community, however, I believe *Masters gymnastics* deserves clearer recognition for age-group practice and competition across the lifespan.

This is an editorial position, not a claim that one word must erase the other. The strongest future may be a structure in which adult gymnastics names the inclusive whole, while Masters gymnastics names a visible, respected pathway within it. Such language could connect British practice more clearly with international competition and with the scientific literature on Masters athletes, without closing the door to anyone beginning later in life.

Looking around the skill also means looking towards the judging table. In our *Gymnastics in London* chapter, Hariesh Jegatheepan brings the perspective of a judge whose experience extends beyond the city and across international competition. Families see a score appear; they may not see the study, concentration, responsibility, teamwork and long days behind it. His contribution makes that work visible and shows why a positive competition cannot be measured by a medal alone.

“

Gymnastics is performed by individuals, but made possible by a community.

History provides another layer. Men's and women's artistic gymnastics retain six- and four-apparatus programmes shaped through long sporting traditions. Those traditions should be understood and celebrated, while recognising that preservation and evolution can coexist. Each generation carries gymnastics forward by learning how to perform, teach, judge and explain it again.

The final chapters return these ideas to family decisions. Coaching words such as *control*, *technique* and *reset* are compressed instructions whose meaning grows through practice. Choosing a programme requires more than asking which club is closest or most successful. Thinking about safety requires neither panic nor false reassurance, but calm questions about progression, supervision, communication and the individual child.

Chelsea gives younger readers the same message in simpler form: a skill may last for only a moment, but many people, choices and forms of care help a gymnast learn it.

That may be the central thought of Issue 4. The quality of a gymnastics experience depends on what surrounds the gymnast—and on whether those systems respect the child, the adult athlete, the family and the sport itself.

I hope these pages help you see not only the skill, but the knowledge, work and relationships that make it possible.

COACH · RESEARCHER · MASTERS GYMNAST

EDITOR

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

EDITORIAL MANIFESTO

Clarity, evidence, and calm understanding

The principles behind every issue we publish.

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.

CLARITY

Explain before advising.

EVIDENCE

Be careful with certainty.

RESPECT

Put people before claims.

IN THIS ISSUE

In Issue 4, we look around the skill—from science, the hip and pelvis, dietary fat and whole-week recovery to adult competitive gymnastics. We explore London journeys through a judge’s perspective, celebrate men’s and women’s apparatus traditions, explain coaching words, help families choose a programme and challenge myths about safety and injuries.

FEATURE

Gymnastics on the Scientific Stage

From a new discipline in gymnastics medicine to original research from Kensington, what ACSM 2026 showed about the sport's growing scientific voice.



Dr Stefan Kolimechkov at the 2026 ACSM Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah.

FROM LONDON TO UTAH

A meeting that matters



For Dr Stefan Kolimechkov, the American College of Sports Medicine Annual Meeting has become the most important professional event of the year.

His first on-site meeting was Boston in 2024. Atlanta followed in 2025. In May 2026, the journey continued from Kensington to Salt Lake City, where researchers, clinicians, educators and practitioners gathered for the 73rd ACSM Annual Meeting.

2024 Boston	2025 Atlanta	2026 Salt Lake City
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This was not simply another conference visit. It brought together the different parts of Stefan's work: gymnastics coaching, children's physical development, scientific research and the responsibility to translate evidence into something useful for families.

EDITOR'S VIEW

“For me, ACSM is the gold standard in our field. Its Annual Meeting is the event I most want to attend each year because it connects research with the people who apply it.”

2026 ANNUAL MEETING SPOTLIGHT

The meeting took place from 26 to 29 May at the Salt Palace convention centre in Salt Lake City. Its annual spotlight examined physical activity, exercise and technology, including how wearables, artificial intelligence, virtual platforms and advanced diagnostics are changing the way movement is studied, prescribed and experienced.

Gymnastics was not sitting quietly at the edge of the conversation. It was beginning to claim a scientific space of its own.

HOW TO READ A SCIENTIFIC MEETING

A conference is where knowledge moves

A scientific meeting is not a textbook containing only settled facts. It is a place where knowledge appears at several different stages.

ESTABLISHED EVIDENCE

Peer-reviewed work and careful summaries of what is already known.

EMERGING EVIDENCE

New posters and presentations that may still require fuller review and replication.

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETATION

Experienced practitioners connecting research with the realities they see in athletes.

KGM REPORTING RULE

Describe what was presented, identify its evidence stage and keep the limitations beside the conclusion. Conference excitement should never erase scientific caution.

That distinction matters. A compelling lecture or poster can point towards an important idea, but it does not automatically establish a final answer.

At ACSM, the poster hall made this process visible. Hundreds of researchers stood beside their work, answered questions, explained their methods and discussed limitations directly with other delegates. The posters were not simply displays. They created a period of scientific conversation.

Among the gymnastics-related work was a poster exploring how elite Italian men's artistic gymnasts and coaches perceived free-weight training. Its presence illustrated the practical questions now being examined within the sport: how physical preparation is understood, how evidence enters coaching practice and where knowledge gaps may remain.

EVIDENCE STATUS

The Italian study was encountered as a conference poster. KGM treats it as **emerging conference evidence**, not as an established recommendation for young or recreational gymnasts.

The most significant gymnastics moment of the week, however, did not come from a poster. It came from a dedicated clinical session.

A NEW DISCIPLINE ON THE PODIUM

When a sport receives care that understands the sport



Dr Stefan Kolimechkov with Elspeth Hart, Alyssa Herrera-Set and Kerry Bair after the gymnastics medicine session.

On Thursday 28 May, ACSM hosted *A New Discipline on the Podium: The Evolution of Gymnastics Medicine*. Hart, Herrera-Set and Bair addressed a simple but important problem: gymnasts experience demands that are not always understood fully when their care is approached as if they were athletes from any other sport.

Gymnastics combines weight-bearing through the hands, repeated impacts, extreme ranges, rotation and inversion. Physical demands sit alongside nutritional pressures, psychological strain and the culture in which training takes place.

The idea is not that every gymnast needs a new kind of doctor. It is that the people supporting gymnasts need a shared understanding of the sport.

● Sports medicine	● Physiotherapy
● Sports nutrition	● Mental health
● Coaching	● Research
● Parents and carers	● Long-term wellbeing

PROFESSIONAL REFLECTION

“The strongest feeling was pride. It was amazing to see gymnastics having its own scientific discipline and receiving a dedicated voice at one of the world's leading meetings in sports medicine and exercise science.”

This direction is supported by a 2025 peer-reviewed article proposing gymnastics medicine as a concentrated field through which clinicians could improve collaboration, research, safety and athlete health.^[2]

MORE THAN INJURY TREATMENT

Medicine, nutrition and mental health belong together

A sport-specific approach is valuable partly because the presenting problem may be only one part of the picture. A painful wrist may reflect repeated loading through a growing area of bone and requires appropriate assessment and gradual return. Recovery cannot be separated completely from energy intake, sleep, confidence, training expectations and the athlete's wider environment.

PHYSICAL HEALTH Load, injury, rehabilitation and safe progression.	NUTRITION Energy availability, growth, recovery and appropriate support.	MENTAL HEALTH Confidence, pressure, identity and emotional wellbeing.
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The ACSM session placed nutrition and mental health alongside physical injury. That interdisciplinary structure was itself an important message: protecting a gymnast means understanding the whole athlete, not only the painful body part.

A NUTRITION MESSAGE THAT STAYED WITH THE EDITOR

During the nutrition discussion, calcium, vitamin D, zinc and iron were identified as micronutrients deserving particular attention. Protein intake for high-level gymnasts was discussed towards the upper end of sports-nutrition literature, around 2 g per kg of body mass per day in relevant circumstances.

IMPORTANT BOUNDARY

This was a conference discussion about high-level athletes, not a general prescription for recreational children. A number such as 2 g/kg should not become a family feeding target without considering age, total energy intake, training load, health and the rest of the child's diet.

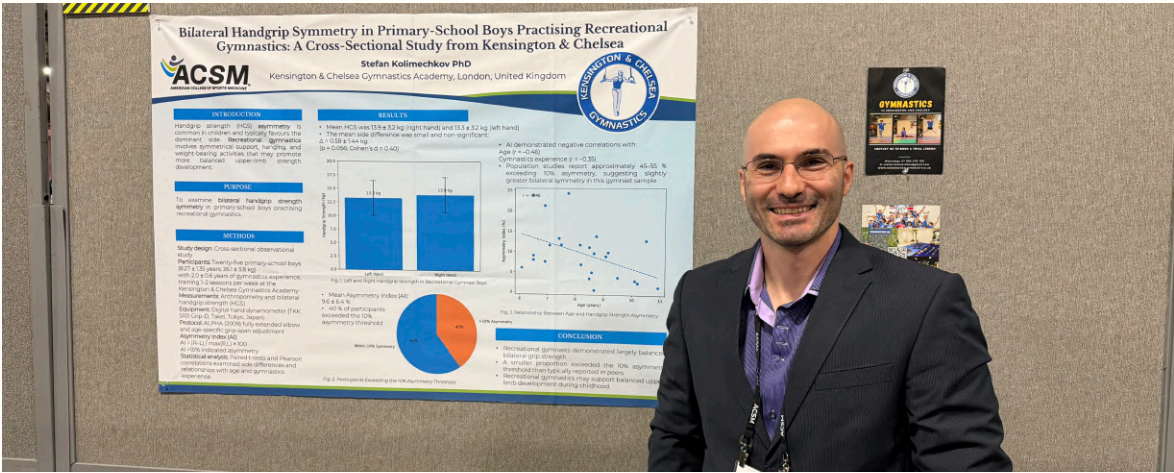
Published research in adolescent rhythmic gymnasts has reported concerns involving energy availability and intakes of calcium, vitamin D, iron and zinc.^[4,5] The lesson is not that every gymnast requires supplements. It is that adequate food and energy availability deserve attention, especially when training becomes demanding or food choices become restricted.

Health notice: This content is general information and not medical advice. For pain, injury, dietary or health concerns, consult an appropriately qualified healthcare professional or registered sports dietitian.

For families, the message is calm and protective: pain should be assessed, food should support growth and training, and emotional wellbeing is part of athlete health.

ORIGINAL RESEARCH FROM KENSINGTON

Twenty-five boys, two hands and one careful question



Dr Stefan Kolimechov presenting poster 232 at the ACSM Annual Meeting on 27 May 2026.

Research collected through Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy entered the international discussion. The study examined bilateral handgrip strength in 25 primary-school boys practising recreational gymnastics. They were, on average, 8.27 years old, had approximately two years of gymnastics experience and trained once or twice each week.

Handgrip strength was measured on both sides using a digital hand dynamometer. Testing followed the ALPHA protocol, including an age- and sex-specific adjustment of the grip span. The work was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

PARTICIPANTS 25 boys	EXPERIENCE 2.0 ± 0.6 years	TRAINING 1–2 sessions/week
RIGHT HAND 13.9 ± 3.2 kg	LEFT HAND 13.3 ± 3.2 kg	ASYMMETRY INDEX 9.6 ± 6.4%

The average difference between sides was 0.58 kg and narrowly missed the conventional threshold for statistical significance ($p = .056$). Ten of the 25 boys, or 40%, exceeded the study's 10% asymmetry threshold.

KGM ORIGINAL FINDING

The group showed broadly similar average strength on the two sides, although meaningful individual variation remained. This is a conference study record, not a peer-reviewed journal publication.^[3]

WHAT THE STUDY CAN AND CANNOT TELL US

Balanced on average does not mean identical

The most useful finding was not that every gymnast was perfectly symmetrical. They were not. The important observation was that average right- and left-hand strength were close within this particular group.

The asymmetry index also tended to be lower among older boys and those with more gymnastics experience. These relationships are interesting, but they cannot establish cause and effect.

SMALL SAMPLE Twenty-five participants from one recreational setting.	ONE MOMENT IN TIME A cross-sectional design cannot show how children changed.
BOYS ONLY The pattern cannot automatically be extended to girls.	NO COMPARISON GROUP The study cannot prove that gymnastics caused the observed balance.

The findings therefore cannot establish that the same pattern would appear in girls, older children, competitive gymnasts or another club. Comparisons with population studies also require care because samples and methods may differ.

THE EVIDENCE BOUNDARY The study found relatively balanced average handgrip strength in this sample. It did not prove that recreational gymnastics caused the balance.

Recreational gymnastics uses the hands in varied and often bilateral ways: supporting, hanging, crawling, balancing and moving the body through space. The findings are consistent with relatively balanced average grip strength in this small sample and offer a useful starting point for further research.

A stronger future design would follow children over time and include an appropriate comparison group. It could also examine girls, training exposure, hand dominance and different levels of gymnastics participation.

For 90 minutes, the poster created exactly the kind of discussion that research needs. Visitors could question the methods, examine the figures and consider what should come next.

Responsible science does not weaken a finding by naming its limits. It shows families exactly how much confidence the finding can carry.

THE COMMUNITY AROUND THE SCIENCE

A scientific organisation is also a community



ACSM Honors, including the formal recognition of the 2026 new Fellows.

The Annual Meeting was not limited to lectures and posters. At the ACSM Town Hall and Business Meeting, members heard about the organisation's position, future direction and forthcoming meetings. It was a reminder that a scientific field is shaped not only through published papers, but also through governance, professional standards and the willingness of members to contribute.

The week concluded with ACSM Honors, where scientific achievement was recognised and new Fellows were formally welcomed. These ceremonies connect current work with a longer professional history: knowledge develops because people build, question and improve it over time.

There was movement outside the lecture rooms too. An organised early-morning hike on Avenues Ridge offered a view across Salt Lake City and the surrounding landscape.

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

On the conference floor, a strength challenge organised by Brigham Young University Exercise Sciences brought research culture and physical participation together. Stefan recorded the leading plank time of 6 minutes 11 seconds and received a recovery massage device and university T-shirt.

It was a light-hearted part of a serious week, but it carried a fitting message: professionals who study movement should not lose their connection with movement itself.

THE WIDER LESSON

What should come back to Kensington?

The value of attending an international scientific meeting is not measured by how many sessions fit into four days. It is measured by what returns home.

CARE SHOULD UNDERSTAND GYMNASTICS

The sport has distinctive physical, nutritional and psychological demands.

CONFERENCE FINDINGS ARE BEGINNINGS

New work should be interpreted according to its design, sample and publication stage.

RECREATIONAL GYMNASTICS BELONGS IN RESEARCH

Children attending once or twice weekly also deserve scientific attention.

HEALTH IS LARGER THAN PERFORMANCE

Strength, nutrition, recovery, wellbeing, progression and enjoyment belong together.

Science should improve practice. Its purpose is not to make coaching sound more complicated, but to help coaches ask better questions, make more responsible decisions and communicate more clearly with families.

From Boston to Atlanta and now Salt Lake City, each ACSM meeting has strengthened the bridge between gymnastics practice and scientific inquiry. The next Annual Meeting will take place in Indianapolis from 1 to 4 June 2027.

THE CONCLUSION

Gymnastics is gaining a stronger scientific voice, and Kensington can contribute to that conversation.

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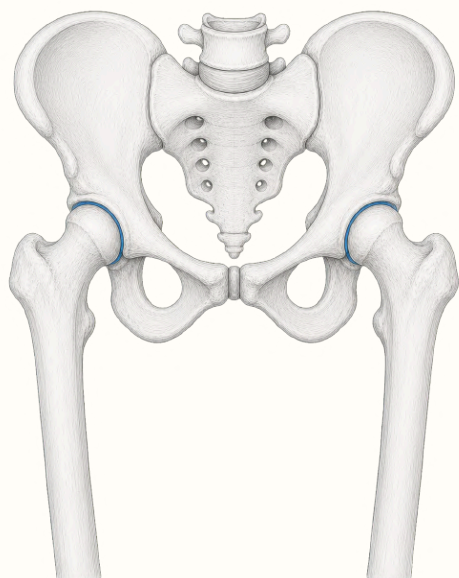
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Foundations

Gymnastics Anatomy

The Hip & Pelvis: Where the Trunk Meets the Legs

Understanding how a central body region helps organise shape, balance, force and movement



This chapter introduces four important parts of the region: the gluteus maximus; the gluteus medius and minimus; the iliacus and psoas major; and the adductor group. These structures matter, but none works alone. Muscles share tasks with one another and respond to the rest of the body.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

This is an anatomy guide, not a flexibility test or home-training programme. Its purpose is to make coaching language and movement easier to understand.

When families hear the word *hip*, they may think of a single joint at the side of the body. In movement, however, the picture is broader. The two hip joints sit within the pelvis, surrounded by muscles that connect the trunk and legs. Together, this region helps a gymnast change shape, balance on one leg, lift or lower the legs, jump, land and move between positions.

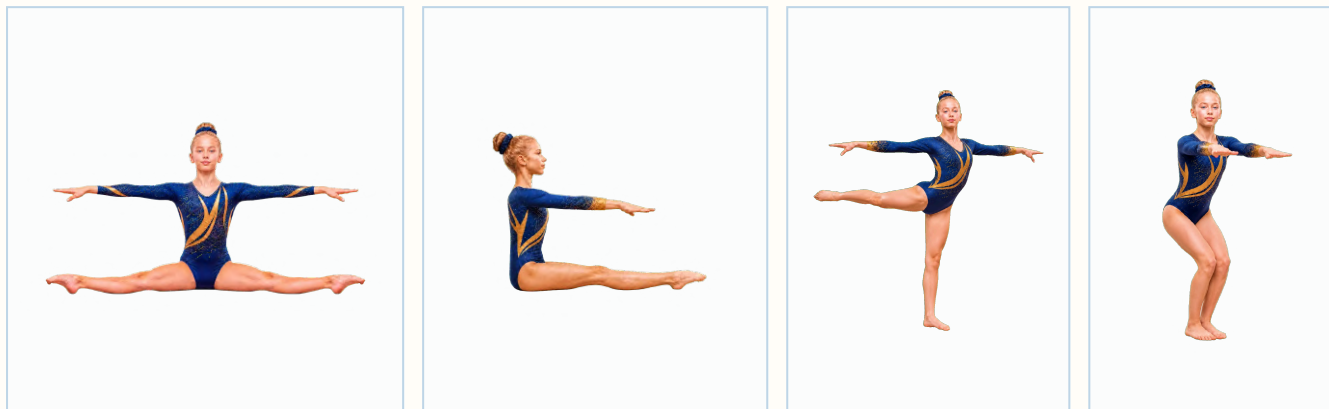
The pelvis is not simply a fixed bowl, and the hips do not work as two isolated hinges. Position, speed, direction and support all change what the region is being asked to do. A quiet balance has different demands from a fast jump. A pike has different demands from an arch. Even when two gymnasts appear to make the same shape, their bodies may organise it slightly differently.

MOVEMENT LENS

The hip and pelvis do not have one correct position for every gymnastics task. Useful organisation changes with the movement.

A Region That Changes With the Task

The hip and pelvis are involved whenever the trunk and legs have to organise movement together. That contribution changes from task to task.



In a two-footed landing, the body is managing motion and force across several joints. The hips, knees and ankles change position while muscles around the trunk and lower limbs contribute to control. In a single-leg balance, the demand is different: the body must organise itself over a narrower base of support. In a pike or straddle, range of motion becomes more visible, but range is only part of the story. Control, timing and the position of neighbouring joints also matter.

This is why anatomy cannot be reduced to a list in which one muscle has one job. A muscle may contribute differently as joint position changes. Several muscles can share a task. The same muscle can shorten, lengthen or hold relatively steady while producing or controlling force.

POSITION IS NOT PERFORMANCE

A still photograph captures only one instant. It cannot show how a gymnast arrived there, what forces were present or how the position was controlled. Two shapes that look similar may have been produced through different combinations of movement at the hips, pelvis and spine.

STABILITY IS NOT STIFFNESS

In family conversations, *stable* can sound like *motionless*. In movement science, stability is better understood as the ability to organise and adapt. Sometimes the pelvis moves. Sometimes it remains relatively steady. What matters is whether the movement suits the task—not whether the body has been frozen into one universal posture.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

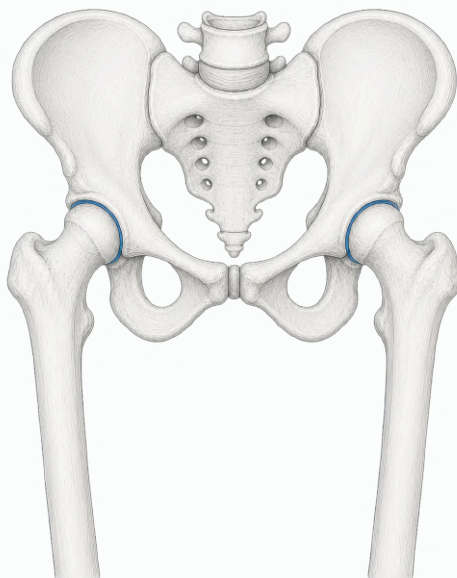
“Good pelvic control means keeping the pelvis perfectly still.” **A calmer view:** good control may include movement. The useful amount depends on the task.

LONDON LENS

A child may arrive after lessons, walking, sitting, carrying a school bag and travelling across London. That context can affect how movement feels that day. It does not prove that a muscle has become “inactive” or that ordinary sitting has caused an injury.

FOUNDATIONAL ANATOMY

What Do We Mean by the Hip and Pelvis?



The **pelvis** is a ring of bones at the base of the trunk. On each side, the ilium, ischium and pubis form part of a socket called the **acetabulum**. The rounded head of the femur—the thigh bone—fits into this socket to form the **hip joint**^[1].

Because the hip is a ball-and-socket joint, it can move in several directions. The thigh can move forwards and backwards, away from and towards the midline, and rotate. Most real movements combine these possibilities rather than staying perfectly within one plane.

The pelvis also meets the spine at the sacrum and connects the left and right sides of the body. It therefore belongs to both the trunk and lower-limb story. Muscles cross from the pelvis to the femur, from the spine to the pelvis or femur, and across neighbouring regions. Their pull depends partly on where the bones are positioned.

A JOINT BUILT FOR MOVEMENT AND SUPPORT

The shape of the femoral head and acetabulum gives the hip substantial bony stability while still allowing a wide range of motion^[1]. The joint capsule, ligaments, labrum and surrounding muscles also contribute. This chapter concentrates on muscles, but muscle is only one part of the system.

THE PELVIS IS NOT ONE JOINT

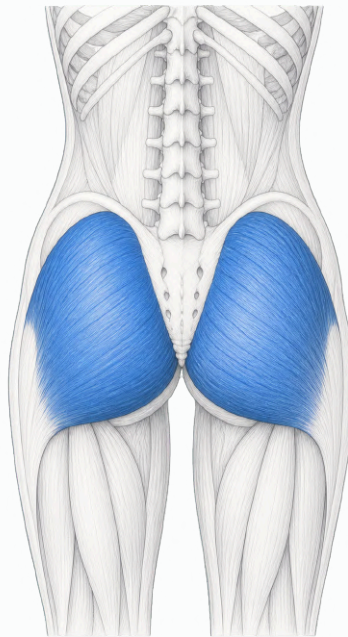
It is common to talk about “the pelvis” as if it were a single movable piece. In practice, the region includes several bones and joints, and its visible position reflects relationships among the hips, spine and whole body. A change that appears to come from the pelvis may involve more than one place.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

A coach's reference to “hips” may concern the hip joints, the position of the pelvis, or the way the trunk and legs are working together. Context gives the word its meaning.

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Gluteus Maximus

**WHERE IT SITS**

The gluteus maximus is the large, superficial muscle at the back of the hip. It arises across the back of the pelvis and sacral region and attaches to the upper femur and the iliotibial tract.

WHAT IT DOES

It contributes strongly to **hip extension**—moving the thigh behind the body or helping the body rise when the hip is flexed. It can also contribute to rotation and, depending on position and which fibres are involved, to movements towards or away from the midline.

IN GYMNASTICS

Hip extension appears in many forms: driving the body upwards from a more flexed position, moving towards a straight line, controlling a change between shapes, or helping organise the lower body during jumping and landing. The gluteus maximus can contribute, but it does so alongside the hamstrings, adductors, trunk muscles and other structures.

Research examining exercise tasks confirms that gluteus maximus force changes considerably with the movement and external demand^[5]. That is useful evidence about task dependence; it is not a ranking of gymnastics exercises for children.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“The glutes are the body's power switch.”

The phrase is memorable but incomplete. Jumping, landing and holding shape depend on force, timing and coordination across several joints.

MOVEMENT LENS

When the hip moves from a folded position towards a straighter one, gluteus maximus may contribute to extension. The amount and timing depend on the task.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

A gymnast does not need to “squeeze as hard as possible” in every position. More muscle activity is not automatically better organisation.

From Anatomy to Movement

Extension is shared work

The gluteus maximus is strongly associated with hip extension, but the body does not allocate the entire action to one muscle. The hamstrings cross the back of the hip, and part of the adductor magnus can also contribute to extension. Their relative contribution changes with joint position, speed, load and whether the feet or hands are supporting the body.

IN GYMNASTICS

- moving from a crouched position towards standing;
- preparing and producing force for a jump;
- changing from a more folded shape towards a straighter line;
- controlling the hip as the body receives force in a landing;
- contributing to an arch or leg-behind-body position.

These examples share anatomy, but they are not the same task. A landing involves absorbing and controlling motion. A jump involves producing motion. A held shape may involve relatively little visible movement even while muscles produce force.

THE BODY DOES NOT READ MUSCLE DIAGRAMS

Anatomy illustrations separate structures so that we can see them. The nervous system does not activate a page in a textbook. It coordinates many muscles across many joints, continuously adjusting to balance, direction, speed and the environment.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“If a gymnast cannot hold a straight line, the gluteus maximus must be weak.” **A calmer view:** the visible result may reflect understanding, timing, confidence, range, fatigue, the position of other joints or many factors together. A photograph cannot diagnose the cause.

MOVEMENT LENS

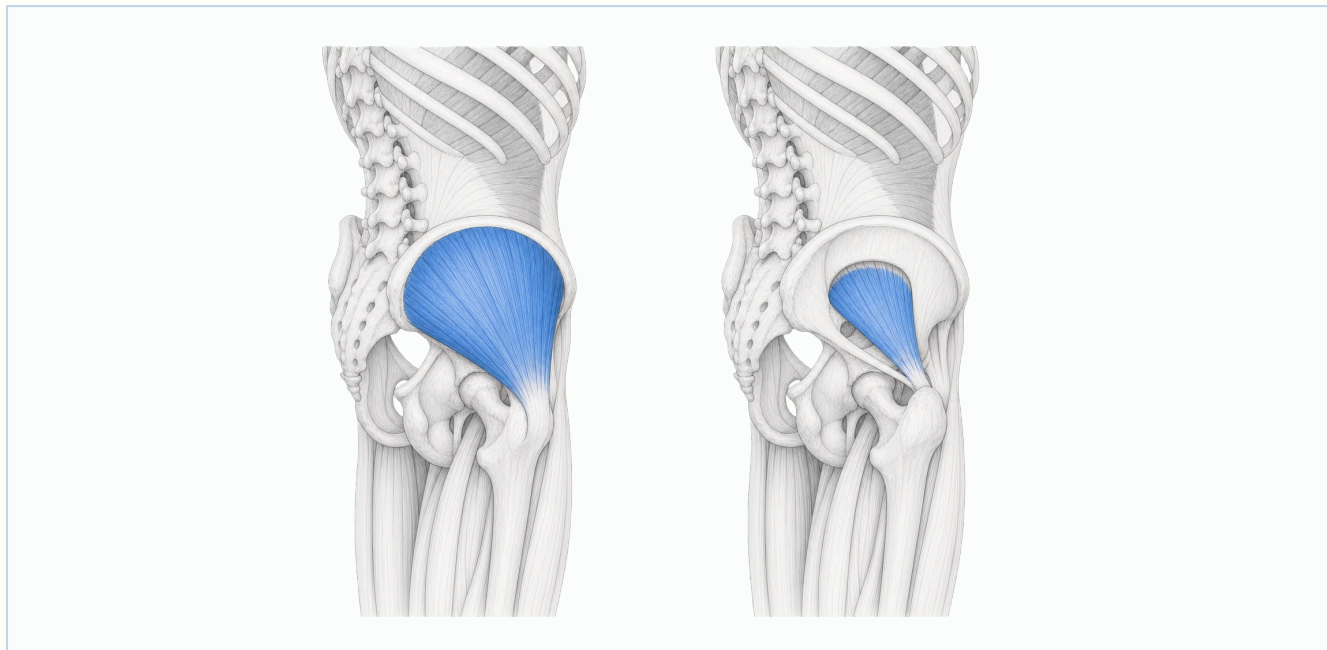
A muscle can help create movement, slow movement or hold against a demand. The same structure may play a different role from one moment to the next.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Coaches observe the whole action. Families should be cautious about explaining a movement through one muscle or one body part.

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Gluteus Medius & Minimus



WHERE THEY SIT

The gluteus medius lies on the outer surface of the pelvis, partly covered by the gluteus maximus. The smaller gluteus minimus lies deeper. Both attach from the pelvis to the upper femur.

WHAT THEY DO

They contribute to moving the thigh away from the body's midline—**hip abduction**—and to controlling the relationship between the pelvis and femur. Different portions have different lines of pull, so describing either muscle as having only one action is too simple.

IN GYMNASTICS

The lateral gluteals may contribute when a gymnast:

- balances on one leg;
- moves the legs apart in a straddle position;
- controls side-to-side organisation;
- changes direction;
- manages the relationship between the pelvis, thigh and knee during take-off or landing.

The contribution is shared with other muscles. A visible shift of the pelvis is not, by itself, proof that these muscles are weak.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“The side glutes keep the pelvis level.”

This describes one important function during some tasks, especially single-leg support, but it can become misleading if treated as a universal rule. Gymnastics deliberately includes tilting, rotating and changing body shape. The question is whether the movement is organised for the task.

Research on gluteus medius shows that its segments can behave differently across exercise conditions^[4]. This supports a broader lesson: muscles are not uniform switches, and task context matters.

MOVEMENT LENS

During single-leg support, the body must organise itself over one hip. That requires coordinated contributions from the hip, pelvis, trunk, standing leg and foot.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Balance is a whole-body achievement. It should not be reduced to “strong hips” or a perfectly level pelvis.

Stable Does Not Mean Still

Pelvic stability is adaptable control

The word *stability* often brings to mind a body held rigidly in place. Human movement works differently. The pelvis may remain relatively steady in one task and move substantially in another. Stability describes the ability to manage position and movement in relation to the demand.

IN A BALANCE

Small adjustments are normal. The foot, ankle, knee, hip, pelvis, trunk, arms, head and vision all contribute. A gymnast may appear almost still while the body makes continuous corrections.

IN A JUMP OR LANDING

The pelvis changes position as the hips and knees flex and extend. Preventing all movement would not be the goal. The body needs an organised way to produce or receive force.

IN A SHAPE

The visible line reflects movement across more than one joint. A pike, arch or straddle cannot be explained by pelvic position alone.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“A tilted pelvis is always incorrect.” **A calmer view:** the pelvis changes orientation during normal and skilled movement. Whether a position is useful depends on the task, the moment and the individual.

CONTROL IS NOT A PERSONALITY TRAIT

Children do not either “have” or “lack” control. Coordination develops through experience, instruction, growth and practice. It can look different across skills and from one day to another. Fatigue, attention, confidence and unfamiliarity can all influence what families see.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

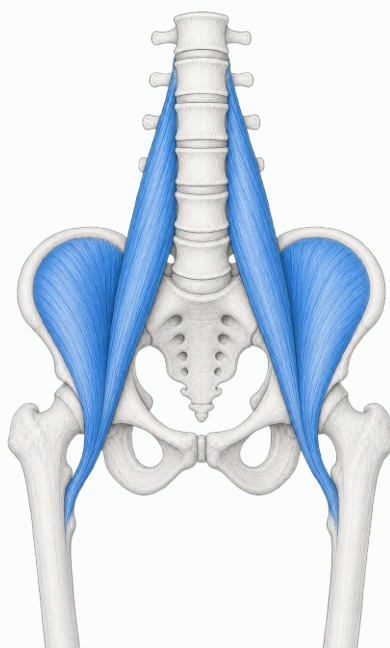
Laboratory measures can describe angles, forces and muscle activity, but they do not establish one ideal pelvic position for every child and every gymnastics action.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Useful coaching cues are task-specific. A phrase such as “keep your hips square” may help organise one movement; it is not a permanent rule for how a child's pelvis should look.

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

Iliacus & Psoas Major



WHERE THEY SIT

The **iliacus** begins on the inside of the pelvis. The **psoas major** begins along the lumbar spine. They travel through the front of the hip and attach near the upper femur. Together they are often discussed as the **iliopsoas**, although modern anatomical work shows that their structures and insertions should not be treated as perfectly identical^[2].

WHAT THEY DO

Both contribute strongly to **hip flexion**—bringing the thigh and trunk closer together at the hip. Their position also allows them to contribute to hip and trunk organisation in ways that depend on the task and which part of the body is moving.

IN GYMNASTICS

Hip flexion is visible when a gymnast:

- lifts a leg forwards;
- moves towards a pike;
- brings the thighs towards the trunk;
- holds or changes a compressed shape;
- steps or runs before a gymnastics action.

These muscles work with other hip flexors, including rectus femoris and sartorius, and with the abdominal and thigh muscles. The visible movement is never the work of iliopsoas alone.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“The psoas is the hidden cause of posture problems.”

The psoas is anatomically interesting because it connects the spine and femur, but that does not make it a universal explanation for posture, pain or performance. Clinical reviews emphasise that hip and groin symptoms can have several possible sources and require appropriate assessment^[3].

MOVEMENT LENS

When the thigh approaches the trunk, the hip is flexing. Whether the leg moves, the trunk moves or both move depends on the task.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Families should not try to diagnose a “tight psoas” from a child's posture or flexibility. Anatomy describes possibilities; it does not provide a diagnosis.

Flexion Does Not Automatically Mean “Tight”

Gymnastics uses large ranges of motion, so families often hear words such as *tight*, *flexible* and *open*. These words can be useful in ordinary conversation, but they are not precise diagnoses.

A FEELING IS REAL—BUT THE EXPLANATION MAY BE UNCERTAIN

A child may describe a pulling, effort or restriction around the front of the hip. That experience matters. It does not, on its own, identify which structure is involved or why the sensation occurs. Joint position, unfamiliar movement, muscle effort, fatigue, growth, previous activity and many other factors can influence how a movement feels.

RANGE IS NOT CONTROLLED BY ONE MUSCLE

Hip movement reflects the shape of the bones, the joint and surrounding tissues, the position of the pelvis and spine, nervous-system tolerance, familiarity with the task and active control. Stretching one named muscle is not a universal solution.

MORE RANGE IS NOT ALWAYS THE GOAL

Gymnastics sometimes rewards large ranges, but useful movement also requires strength, timing and control within the range a gymnast uses. A child should not be pushed towards a target because another gymnast appears more flexible.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Sitting at school shortens the hip flexors.” **A calmer view:** time spent sitting may affect how the body feels when activity begins, but ordinary sitting does not allow us to diagnose shortened muscles or predict injury.

MOVEMENT LENS

A pike brings the trunk and thighs closer. How that shape is shared among the hips, pelvis and spine varies. The final picture does not reveal a single cause.

SAFETY NOTE

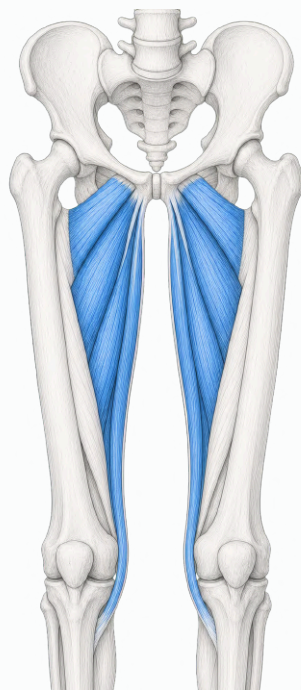
Pain should not be treated as a flexibility challenge. A child with pain, limping or difficulty bearing weight needs appropriate adult attention and, where indicated, medical assessment^[9].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Listen to the child's experience, share concerns with the coach and avoid home diagnoses based on one posture or stretch.

MUSCLE SPOTLIGHT

The Adductors



WHERE THEY SIT

The adductors are a group of muscles along the inside of the thigh. The group includes adductor longus, brevis and magnus, together with gracilis and pectineus in common functional descriptions. Their origins, insertions and lines of pull differ.

WHAT THEY DO

Their name comes from **adduction**—moving the thigh towards the body's midline. That is only part of the story. Depending on the muscle and joint position, members of the group may also contribute to hip flexion, extension or rotation. In the transverse plane, a published gait model describes roles in producing or controlling femoral rotation at different phases^[8].

IN GYMNASTICS

The adductors may contribute when a gymnast:

- brings the legs towards one another;
- controls movement into or out of a straddle;
- organises the thighs in a straight-body position;
- transfers force between the pelvis and legs;
- stabilises or changes direction during support, take-off or landing.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Adductors only squeeze the legs together.”

This describes the group's name but not its complete function. Muscle action is influenced by the starting position and by what the rest of the body is doing. Adductor magnus, for example, has different portions whose lines of pull support different contributions.

MOVEMENT LENS

Moving into a straddle and returning from it are related but not identical demands. The adductors can produce force while shortening, lengthening or holding, depending on the action.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Inner-thigh effort is not automatically a problem. Pain, however, should not be interpreted or treated through an anatomy article.

More Than Squeezing the Legs Together

The adductors are a useful example of why muscle names can mislead. Their group name describes one direction of movement, yet their actual contribution depends on geometry and task.

IN A STRADDLE

As the legs move apart, tissues on the inner thigh may lengthen while also producing force to control the movement. When the legs return towards the midline, the same region may contribute differently. The body is not simply “on” in one direction and “off” in the other.

IN A JUMP OR LANDING

The thighs, pelvis and trunk must organise force in three dimensions. Hip adduction is only one visible component. Rotation, flexion and extension, together with knee and foot position, change the demand.

IN A STRAIGHT SHAPE

When coaches ask for the legs to remain together, the cue concerns the whole visible line and the organisation of the movement. It does not mean that the adductors should be contracted maximally at every moment.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“If the knees separate, the adductors must be weak.” **A calmer view:** the observation may relate to understanding, timing, hip rotation, balance, fatigue, confidence or task difficulty. One visible detail cannot identify the cause.

WHY JOINT POSITION MATTERS

As the hip bends, straightens or rotates, a muscle's line of pull relative to the joint changes. Biomechanical models therefore sometimes disagree with the one-word actions printed in basic anatomy lists. This is not a failure of anatomy. It is a reminder that living movement is more complex than a table.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

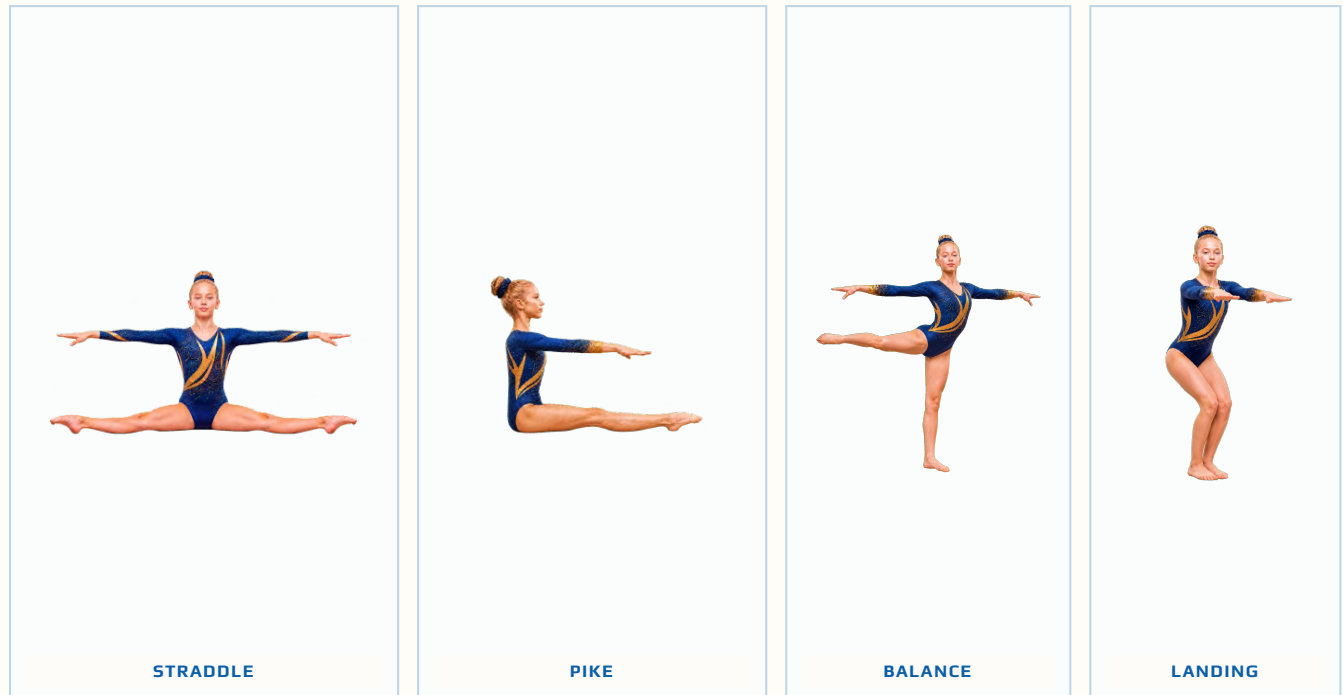
The cited functional model examines adult gait and transverse-plane mechanics^[8]. It helps explain a biomechanical principle but does not prescribe how a recreational child should perform a gymnastics skill.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Anatomy can improve understanding without turning a family observation into a muscle diagnosis.

MOVEMENT LENS

Straddle, Pike, Balance & Landing



These familiar situations show how the hip and pelvis change their organisation with the task.

STRADDLE

The thighs move away from the midline, with position shared among the hip joints, pelvis and trunk. The lateral hip muscles and adductors can both contribute, but in different ways and at different moments. A wider straddle is not automatically a better or safer one.

PIKE

The hips flex as the thighs and trunk move closer. The hip flexors may help create or hold the position, while other muscles control the trunk, knees and ankles. The visible shape does not tell us how much movement occurred at each joint.

SINGLE-LEG BALANCE

The body organises itself over one hip and one foot. Gluteus medius and minimus may contribute to the relationship between pelvis and femur, while the trunk, standing leg, foot, arms, head and vision all participate.

LANDING

The hips, knees and ankles change position as the body receives force. Muscles around the hip contribute to controlling motion, but landing is a coordinated whole-body action. Gymnastics research shows that landing patterns vary with age and training stage, and findings from specific laboratory tasks should not be turned into one universal technique rule^[7].

A USEFUL CORE IDEA IS ADAPTABLE:

The hip and pelvis do not need to look the same in every task. Good organisation means responding appropriately to the movement, the surface and the gymnast.

What Changes Between Positions?

THE DIRECTION OF MOVEMENT

A straddle emphasises movement away from the midline. A pike emphasises hip flexion. A balance may involve very little visible motion. A landing includes rapid changes across several joints.

THE BASE OF SUPPORT

Two feet, one foot, the hands or an apparatus create different relationships between the body and the environment. The hip muscles respond within that larger support system.

THE AMOUNT OF FORCE

A gentle shape on the floor differs from a dynamic take-off or landing. A position that appears similar can place very different demands on the body depending on speed and external force.

THE ROLE OF GRAVITY

The same joint action can require different muscular contributions when the body changes orientation. Lifting a leg, lowering it or holding it against gravity are related but distinct tasks.

THE AVAILABLE RANGE

Children vary. Hip structure, age, experience, confidence and other factors influence the range they use. Research in typically developing children demonstrates variation in measured hip range and cautions against treating one value as a universal norm^[6,10].

THE NEED FOR PRECISION

Some tasks allow more individual variation; others require a narrower relationship with an apparatus, partner or landing area. Coaches adapt cues to the purpose of the movement.

A USEFUL RANGE IS ADAPTABLE

Gymnastics does not require every child to reach the maximum possible range in every position. It requires movement that is appropriate, controlled and progressively developed.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Comparing two still photographs may hide the most important differences: how the gymnast moved, what the task required and how the position felt.

What Families May Notice Over Time

Children's movement changes as they grow, learn and become familiar with gymnastics. Families may notice:

SOME POSITIONS BECOME EASIER TO ORGANISE

A child may begin to understand where the hips are and how a cue relates to a shape. This can look like a change in strength or flexibility even when learning and confidence are important parts of the improvement.

RANGE DOES NOT DEVELOP EVENLY

One direction may feel easier than another. Left and right sides may not look identical. Small differences are common and do not, by themselves, establish a problem.

GROWTH CAN CHANGE FAMILIAR MOVEMENT

Changes in limb length, body proportions and body mass can temporarily alter timing and the way a familiar skill feels. The child is not necessarily “going backwards”; the movement system may be adapting.

THE SAME CHILD CAN LOOK DIFFERENT ON DIFFERENT DAYS

Sleep, school demands, travel, food, mood, attention, recent activity and confidence can all influence readiness. A single lesson is not a complete measure of development.

COACHING LANGUAGE BECOMES MORE MEANINGFUL

Words such as *hips*, *square*, *straight*, *pike* and *straddle* become connected to repeated movement experiences. Understanding develops gradually.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“One side looks different, so something must be wrong.” **A calmer view:** ordinary variation is common. A coach can monitor movement in context. Pain, limping, sudden change or loss of function belongs to a different conversation and should receive appropriate attention.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Studies measuring children's hip range report population patterns, not personal targets^[6,10]. Measurement method, age and sample characteristics influence the result.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Look for the child's overall experience: comfort, confidence, understanding and gradual development. Avoid turning one angle or shape into a home test.

What the Science Allows Us to Say

Established anatomy is the strongest foundation

The femoral head and acetabulum form the hip joint, and muscles around the pelvis and femur contribute to movement and control^[1]. The broad locations and actions described in this chapter are well established.

Muscle function is task-dependent

Modern anatomical, electromyographic and modelling research shows why a muscle cannot always be assigned one fixed action. Joint position, force direction, speed and the rest of the body change its contribution^[2,4,5,8].

Gymnastics research adds context—but has limits

Laboratory studies can compare landing forces, joint angles or muscle activity. One study involving gymnasts and age-matched non-athletes found different neuromuscular landing patterns across training stages^[7]. Its specific task, sample and measurements matter. It does not tell us how every child should land, nor does it isolate the hip and pelvis from the rest of the body.

Children's bodies show variation

Paediatric studies demonstrate variation in hip range of motion and developmental measures^[6,10]. These data help clinicians and researchers describe groups. They should not be converted into magazine flexibility targets or used to judge a child from a photograph.

What the evidence does not support

The research reviewed here does not support diagnosing a child as having “inactive glutes”, a “tight psoas”, a “misaligned pelvis” or a specific injury based on an ordinary family observation. It also does not establish one ideal pelvic position for every gymnastics task.

RESEARCH NOTE

Evidence in this area includes anatomy studies, adult laboratory research, clinical reviews and smaller athlete studies. Methods and populations vary. KGM therefore uses these sources to explain principles, not to prescribe individual technique or treatment.

MOVEMENT LENS

Anatomy helps us ask better questions. It does not remove the need to observe the whole child and the whole task.

Safety and Health Notices

This chapter is educational. It is not an assessment, diagnosis, treatment plan or individual flexibility programme.

Gymnastics positions can create strong sensations of effort or stretch. Children should be encouraged to describe what they feel in clear, ordinary language. Coaches and families should not pressure a child through pain or use the magazine to decide which structure is responsible.

STOP AND COMMUNICATE

A child should tell the coach if a movement causes pain, feels suddenly different or makes it difficult to continue normally. The coach can stop or adapt the activity and inform the parent or carer in line with the programme's procedures.

SEEK APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

NHS guidance says hip pain in children should be checked because several causes are possible. Sudden hip, thigh or knee pain, limping or inability to put weight on one leg requires urgent advice through a GP or NHS 111^[9]. Always follow current NHS guidance and local medical advice.

AVOID HOME DIAGNOSIS

Posture, side-to-side difference, a limited-looking shape or a feeling described as “tight” cannot identify an injury. Do not use stretching, massage or strengthening to treat an assumed problem without appropriate guidance.

RETURN BELONGS TO THE INDIVIDUAL

After pain or injury, return to gymnastics should follow advice from the appropriate healthcare professional and communication with the coach. A magazine cannot set a return timetable.

TRAINING NOTICE

Gymnastics skills should be taught and supervised by appropriately qualified coaches in a suitable environment. This chapter explains anatomy; it does not teach advanced skills or prescribe exercises.

HEALTH NOTICE

If you are unsure, speak to the child's parent or carer, coach and an appropriate healthcare professional. In an emergency, follow current NHS emergency guidance.

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Reference note References are selected to explain anatomy, movement principles, paediatric variation and evidence limits. Findings from adults, clinical populations, laboratory tasks and trained gymnasts are not assumed to apply directly to every recreational child.

Foundations

Food, Growth & Gymnastics

Fats: The Most Misunderstood Nutrient

Why growing children need dietary fat—and why the whole pattern matters more than fear

OILY FISH

OLIVE OIL



NUTS + SEEDS

EGGS

YOGHURT

CHELSEA EXPLAINS

Fat is not a warning sign on my food. It is one part of the varied food that helps my growing body through school, gymnastics and home life.

At the end of a London school day, food decisions can become rushed. A child may eat at school, travel across the city and arrive at gymnastics before the family evening meal. At the same time, adults are surrounded by labels and messages that describe food as “low fat”, “light” or “healthy”.

It is easy for one idea to take over: fat must be something to avoid.

For a growing child, that conclusion is too simple. Dietary fat provides energy and essential fatty acids. It is part of cell structures and helps the body absorb fat-soluble vitamins. The important question is not whether a child’s food contains fat, but how the whole diet supports growth, learning, activity and health over time^[1].

This chapter explains what fat is, why different fatty acids are discussed differently, and how official guidance can be used without turning meals into a calculation. It is written for families of recreational gymnasts—not as a diet plan, medical assessment or performance programme.

THE SERIES SO FAR

Issue 1: food supports growth, learning and movement.
Issue 2: carbohydrate is an important source of energy.
Issue 3: protein provides amino acids for growth and renewal. Issue 4: dietary fat provides energy and essential fatty acids, and the types of fat still matter.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

No Nutrient Works Alone

**CARBOHYDRATE***accessible energy***PROTEIN***amino acids***FAT***energy + essential fats***DIFFERENT ROLES · ONE GROWING CHILD****THE WHOLE MEAL**

Food rarely arrives as one nutrient. Yoghurt contains carbohydrate, protein and fat. A lentil dish may provide carbohydrate, protein, fibre and a cooking fat. Bread with egg or hummus is not a single-nutrient food either.

That matters because children do not need a competition between carbohydrate, protein and fat. Each has different roles, and the body handles them within the same growing system.

Fat provides about 9 kilocalories per gram, compared with about 4 for protein and 3.75 for carbohydrate^[1]. That is a description of energy density—not an instruction for families to count calories. A more energy-dense nutrient is not automatically “bad”, just as a less energy-dense food is not automatically more suitable for a particular child.

DIFFERENT ROLES, SHARED MEALS

- **Carbohydrate** is an important source of energy for the brain and active muscles.
- **Protein** supplies amino acids used to build and renew tissues and produce many working substances in the body.
- **Fat** supplies energy, provides essential fatty acids and helps carry fat-soluble vitamins.

The UK Eatwell Guide presents balance across a day or even a week, rather than demanding that every plate looks identical^[2]. That approach fits real family life. School meals vary. Appetites change. Training days and quieter days feel different. The goal is a reliable overall pattern, not a perfect photograph of every meal.

KEY IDEA

Growth comes before performance. A nutrient does not need to produce an immediate sporting effect to be important to a young gymnast.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Rather than asking which nutrient is “best”, ask whether the child’s overall food pattern is varied, adequate and workable across the week.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What Dietary Fat Actually Is



Triacylglycerol: three fatty acids attached to a glycerol backbone

INSIDE DIETARY FAT

The words *fat* and *fatty acid* are often used as if they mean exactly the same thing. They are related, but not identical.

Most dietary fat is present as **triacylglycerol**, also called triglyceride: three fatty acids attached to a glycerol backbone^[1]. The characteristics of a fat depend partly on the fatty acids it contains.

FATTY-ACID FAMILIES

- **Saturated fatty acids** contain no carbon-to-carbon double bonds.
- **Monounsaturated fatty acids** contain one double bond.
- **Polyunsaturated fatty acids** contain more than one double bond.

These structural differences affect physical properties and biological behaviour. They also explain why one word—*fat*—can cover several related substances.

Most foods are mixtures. Olive oil is known for monounsaturated fat but also contains saturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids. Butter contains several types too. Fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, dairy foods and meat each contain their own mixtures. It is therefore more accurate to say that a food is *higher in* a particular type of fat than to pretend it contains only that type.

Some unsaturated fatty acids can also have a trans configuration. Naturally occurring trans fats are present at low levels in some foods, while industrial processes can produce others. Current guidance recommends keeping trans-fat intake low and choosing dietary patterns in which fats are mainly unsaturated^[1,3].

LANGUAGE CHECK

“Unsaturated” is a description of chemical structure. It is not a promise that any quantity of any food will automatically improve health.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Food labels separate total fat and saturates because total fat alone does not describe the mixture.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Why a Growing Body Needs Fat

**GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

Fat has several ordinary biological roles. None makes it a miracle nutrient; together, they explain why it should not be treated as something a growing child can simply remove.

ENERGY

Fat is a concentrated source of energy. The body can use fatty acids for energy and store energy in adipose tissue for later use. This is normal physiology, not a judgement about a child's shape.

ESSENTIAL FATTY ACIDS

Two polyunsaturated fatty acids are described as essential because the body cannot make them: alpha-linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid, and linoleic acid, an omega-6 fatty acid^[1]. They can contribute to pathways that produce other physiologically important fatty acids.

CELLS AND COMMUNICATION

Lipids form important parts of cell membranes. They also take part in signalling and many normal processes. Cholesterol, for example, is found in cells and is used to make hormones, vitamin D and substances involved in digestion^[4]. The body makes the cholesterol it needs.

FAT-SOLUBLE VITAMINS

Dietary fat supports the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins. Vitamins A, D, E and K are classified as fat-soluble and are absorbed and transported in association with fats^[5]. Detailed discussion of these vitamins belongs in the next chapter of this series.

A CAREFUL DISTINCTION

Saying that fat participates in normal hormone production does not mean that eating more fat will "balance" or "boost" a child's hormones.

GROWTH LENS

Children are not small adults. They are building tissues, learning and moving while their bodies change. Adequacy and variety matter more than dietary slogans.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What Gymnastics Adds



GYMNASTICS AND THE WEEK

A recreational gymnastics class may last an hour, but the child arrives carrying the rest of the day: breakfast, school, lunch, play, travel, emotions and whatever food was available after the final bell.

Dietary fat contributes to the overall pattern that supports growth and activity. Gymnastics mixes effort of different intensities, and no single nutrient explains or fuels the whole class.

TIMING AND COMFORT

A larger or richer meal immediately before vigorous activity may feel less comfortable for some children. That does not make foods containing fat unsuitable; it means timing and individual tolerance can matter. Children differ in appetite, routine and digestive comfort.

AN ORDINARY SCHOOL-TO-GYM RHYTHM

- 1. Before school:** a familiar breakfast containing a mixture of nutrients.
- 2. During school:** lunch and drinks that form part of the day's overall intake.
- 3. Before gymnastics:** if needed, a practical familiar snack selected for time, appetite and comfort.
- 4. After class:** the family returns to the wider evening meal and normal routine.

This is not a meal plan. It is a reminder that one snack cannot carry the nutritional responsibility for an entire day. A broad review of young-athlete nutrition emphasises adequate overall intake, sustainable habits and caution around performance supplements^[6]. It is a narrative review centred on adolescent athletes rather than a study of primary-school recreational gymnasts, so it should not be turned into precise instructions for this audience.

GYMNASTICS LENS

Fat supports the whole system over time. It is not an instant “power food” and does not need to be removed to make a pre-class snack look athletic.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Population Guidance, Not a Child Target

≤10%

SATURATED FAT
population average

≤35%

TOTAL FAT
population average

≠

A PERSONAL CALCULATION
for one child or one meal

HOW TO READ THE NUMBERS

Official nutrition documents often express fat recommendations as a percentage of energy intake. That language can look like a personal formula, but UK dietary reference values for fats are designed mainly as **population averages**, not precise individual prescriptions^[1].

Current UK guidance states that:

- saturated fatty acids should provide an average for the population of no more than 10% of energy excluding ethanol;
- total fat should provide an average for the population of no more than 35% of energy excluding ethanol;
- most UK fat recommendations apply from around two years of age^[1].

Those figures allow governments and researchers to monitor population patterns. A family does not need to calculate the percentage of energy from fat in a child's lunchbox, nor does one day above or below an average establish a problem.

WHY QUALITY REMAINS IMPORTANT

Population guidance is not meaningless simply because it is not a personal target. SACN and WHO both support reducing saturated and trans fats within the overall diet and favouring appropriate replacements, particularly unsaturated fats^[3,7]. This is a pattern-level message.

For families, the practical translation is usually simpler: include varied foods, use unsaturated oils and spreads as the usual cooking or spreading choices where suitable, include oily fish or appropriate alternatives, and avoid treating foods high in saturated fat as the foundation of every meal^[2].

GUIDANCE

Population averages help describe and improve the diet of groups.

NOT A TRACKING EXERCISE

They do not tell us the exact intake required by one child on one day.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Use official guidance to shape the overall household pattern—not to turn a child's food into arithmetic.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Not All Fats Are the Same

FATTY-ACID FAMILIES

FAMILY	WHAT THE TERM MEANS	FAMILIAR SOURCES	CALM INTERPRETATION
Saturated	Fatty acids with no carbon-to-carbon double bonds	Butter, ghee, cheese, fatty meat, coconut and palm oils, cakes and pastries	These foods can fit within varied diets, but current guidance recommends limiting the population average and replacing some saturated fat with unsaturated fat ^[3,7] .
Monounsaturated	Fatty acids with one double bond	Olive and rapeseed oils, avocado and several nuts	Useful sources of unsaturated fat; the whole food and overall pattern still matter.
Polyunsaturated	Fatty acids with more than one double bond	Oily fish, walnuts, seeds and several vegetable oils	Includes omega-3 and omega-6 families. Two fatty acids are essential ^[1] .
Trans	Unsaturated fatty acids with a trans configuration	Small natural amounts in ruminant foods; some industrially produced fats	UK intake is generally low, but international guidance recommends keeping intake very low ^[1,3] .

REPLACEMENT IS MORE INFORMATIVE THAN REMOVAL

When public-health guidance advises reducing saturated fat, the replacement matters. Replacing some saturated fat with unsaturated fat has a different nutritional meaning from simply removing food and leaving the child with less energy or a narrower diet. SACN’s evidence review supported replacing saturated fats with unsaturated fats, while WHO also identifies unsaturated fats and fibre-containing carbohydrate foods as appropriate replacements^[3,7].

This does not require every household to use the same cuisine. Olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil, nuts, seeds, fish, avocado and many mixed dishes can contribute unsaturated fats. Cultural foods should be understood in context rather than sorted into a moral list.

A CALMER VIEW

“Choose more often” and “choose less often” are more useful phrases than “good” and “bad”. Children need guidance without food fear.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Omega-3 and Omega-6

OMEGA-3

ALA

walnuts · linseed · chia · rapeseed

EPA + DHA

oily fish

OMEGA-6

LA

sunflower · corn oils · nuts · seeds

ESSENTIAL STARTING POINTS

the body cannot make ALA or LA

FREQUENTLY MARKETING, OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD

Omega-3 and omega-6 are names for two families of polyunsaturated fatty acids. The number refers to the location of the first double bond when counted from one end of the fatty-acid chain^[1].

THE ESSENTIAL STARTING POINTS

Alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) is an essential omega-3 fatty acid. Plant sources include walnuts, flax or linseed, chia seeds and rapeseed oil.

Linoleic acid (LA) is an essential omega-6 fatty acid. Sources include sunflower, corn and several other vegetable oils, as well as nuts and seeds.

The body can convert these essential fatty acids into longer-chain products, but conversion of ALA to the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA is limited^[8]. Oily fish—including salmon, sardines, mackerel, herring and trout—is a direct food source. UK guidance is based on at least two portions of fish per week, one of which is oily^[1,2].

FOOD FIRST, CLAIMS SECOND

Omega-3 is often marketed for the brain, school concentration or sporting recovery. Those claims can make a normal nutrient sound like a shortcut. The responsible conclusion is more modest: omega-3 fatty acids have normal biological roles, and a varied diet can include food sources. A supplement should not be offered as a routine performance product for a child. Young-athlete reviews generally do not support supplements for performance without an identified clinical need and appropriate professional advice^[6].

VEGETARIAN CONTEXT

Plant foods can provide ALA. Families avoiding fish or following a restricted diet can discuss the wider pattern with a registered dietitian if they have concerns.

SAFETY NOTE

NHS guidance says not to give whole nuts to children under five; nuts and seeds should be prepared in an age-appropriate form. Allergies require individual care and the child's medical plan should be followed^[9].

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

Fats in Ordinary Foods

MOST FOODS CONTAIN A MIXTURE

FOOD OR INGREDIENT	WHAT IT CAN CONTRIBUTE	KEEP IN MIND
Olive or rapeseed oil	Mainly unsaturated fat	Useful everyday cooking or dressing choices; quantity and cooking method still belong to the whole meal.
Nuts and seeds	Unsaturated fats, protein, fibre and micronutrients	Use age-appropriate forms and respect allergy guidance.
Oily fish	Long-chain omega-3 fats, protein and micronutrients	Variety matters; follow current fish guidance for children and pregnancy within the household.
Avocado	Mainly monounsaturated fat plus fibre and micronutrients	One possible source, not a required “superfood”.
Eggs	Protein, fat and several micronutrients	A mixed food; dietary cholesterol is not the same thing as blood cholesterol.
Milk, yoghurt and cheese	Protein, calcium and varying amounts and types of fat	Age, product and the rest of the diet matter; “full fat” or “low fat” alone cannot describe the whole meal.
Meat and poultry	Protein, iron and varying fat profiles	Cut and preparation change the mixture; leaner options can sit alongside other family foods.
Hummus, tahini and pulse dishes	Unsaturated fats may come from sesame or cooking oils; pulses add protein and fibre	A useful reminder that familiar composite dishes cross nutrient categories.

The Eatwell Guide treats composite foods—sandwiches, casseroles, curries, pasta dishes and pizzas—as combinations of food groups^[2]. This is closer to how London families actually eat than a diagram of isolated nutrients.

FAMILY FOOD

A child does not need avocado, salmon or any fashionable product to have a responsible diet. Affordable, culturally familiar foods can contribute to the same broad pattern.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

The London Reality

1 **SCHOOL MEAL**
direct journey

SCHOOL, TRAVEL AND EVENING CLASSES

For many London families, the challenge is not knowing that varied food matters. It is fitting food into a day that moves between school gates, buses or trains, work, siblings and a fixed class time.

ROUTE ONE: SCHOOL MEAL, DIRECT JOURNEY

The child eats lunch at school and travels straight to gymnastics. A familiar portable snack may bridge the gap until the evening meal. The snack does not need to contain every nutrient; it belongs to the wider day.

ROUTE TWO: HOME BRIEFLY, THEN CLASS

There is time for something more substantial, but appetite and comfort still matter. A sandwich, toast with egg, yoghurt with fruit, hummus with bread or another familiar household option can work. The exact choice depends on what the child ate earlier and what the family normally eats.

ROUTE THREE: LATER FAMILY MEAL

2 **BRIEFLY HOME**
then class

3 **SMALLER SNACK**
later family meal

Some children prefer a smaller food before class and eat the main meal afterwards. That meal may include rice, pasta, potatoes or bread; vegetables; beans, fish, eggs, meat or another protein food; and a cooking fat or sauce. It does not need to look like a sports-science diagram.

London’s cultural diversity means fats appear through olive oil, rapeseed oil, sunflower oil, ghee, tahini, nuts, seeds, fish, dairy foods, meat and many mixed dishes. Public-health guidance still matters, but respectful advice begins with the food a family actually cooks.

LONDON LENS

Practical food is food that the child can eat, the family can obtain and the timetable can accommodate. Consistency does not require perfection.

WHAT THIS IS NOT

These are composite examples, not meal plans or claims about what all London families do.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What Families Often Hear

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

“EATING FAT MAKES CHILDREN FAT.”

A calmer view: body growth and body fat cannot be explained by one nutrient in one food. Fat is energy-dense, and children still need dietary fat. The responsible focus is the overall pattern, not fear of a nutrient^[1].

“LOW FAT ALWAYS MEANS HEALTHIER.”

A calmer view: a label describes one feature of one product. It does not tell us whether the food is appropriate for the child, what replaced the fat or how the food fits across the day. Lower-fat choices can be useful, but the words are not a universal verdict.

“ACTIVE CHILDREN NEED OMEGA-3 SUPPLEMENTS.”

A calmer view: being active does not create an automatic supplement requirement. Food sources can contribute omega-3 fats, and supplements should not be marketed as a performance shortcut for children^[6].

“CHOLESTEROL IS ALWAYS BAD.”

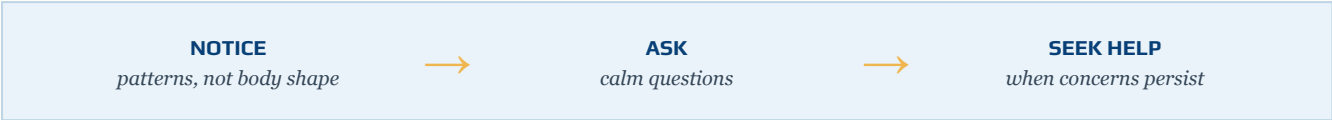
A calmer view: cholesterol is a normal substance used in cells and to make hormones, vitamin D and bile-related substances. High concentrations of particular cholesterol-carrying particles in the blood are a different health question^[4]. Families should not interpret a blood result without appropriate medical advice.

EDITORIAL POSITION

Clear health guidance and a relaxed relationship with food can coexist. We can discuss saturated fat responsibly without teaching children that ordinary family foods make them “good” or “bad”.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

What Families May Notice



ATTENTION WITHOUT SURVEILLANCE

It would be misleading to offer a short list of signs that a child “needs more fat”. Tiredness, appetite change, digestive symptoms, mood, growth and sporting performance can have many influences. Observation is useful; diagnosis requires appropriate assessment.

NOTICE THE PATTERN

- Is the child frightened of foods described as fatty?
- Has the diet become increasingly narrow or rule-bound?
- Are allergy, sensory, cultural or medical restrictions making variety difficult?
- Is the school-to-gym gap repeatedly too long for the child’s appetite and comfort?
- Are there persistent symptoms, growth concerns or distress around eating?

ASK CALM QUESTIONS

Instead of “Have you eaten too much fat?”, try: “What food have you had since lunch?” “Are you hungry now?” “Would a familiar snack feel comfortable before class?” The purpose is to understand the day, not inspect the child’s body or grade the meal.

SEEK APPROPRIATE HELP

Persistent symptoms, growth concerns, suspected allergy, significant restriction or distress around food should be discussed with a GP or appropriately qualified paediatric professional. A registered dietitian can provide individual nutrition assessment. Coaches can share relevant observations but should not diagnose or prescribe a therapeutic diet.

THE GOAL IS CALM ATTENTION, NOT SURVEILLANCE.

Families can support regular, varied food and a healthy conversation while leaving medical questions to qualified professionals.

WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES NOT SAY

It does not say that every child needs the same diet, that all full-fat foods are preferable, or that official saturated-fat guidance should be ignored. It says that guidance must be applied through an adequate whole diet—not through fear.

FOOD, GROWTH & GYMNASTICS

The Whole Diet, Not Fear of One Nutrient

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

Dietary fat is essential, but no single fat, food or supplement carries a child’s development. A responsible pattern provides enough food, includes varied sources of unsaturated and essential fats, and treats foods higher in saturated fat with proportion rather than panic.

For gymnastics families, the practical work is often ordinary: breakfast before school, a lunch the child can eat, something workable between school and class, and an evening meal that fits family life. Growth comes before performance, and consistency matters more than perfection.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Children need adequate, varied food. Fat is part of that pattern. The types of fat and balance of the whole diet still matter—but healthy guidance should never become food fear.

LOOKING AHEAD

In Issue 5, we will explore vitamins: what they do, why more is not automatically better, and how varied food supports the growing body.

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Foundations

Recovery in Gymnastics

The Whole Week Matters

Why school, travel and ordinary family life can change how a gymnastics lesson feels

The class is familiar. The coach is familiar. Even the apparatus may be the same. Yet one week a child enters the gym full of energy and confidence; the next, the same child appears quieter, slower to settle or less certain about a skill they usually enjoy.

That difference does not automatically mean lost progress, poor motivation or a problem with the lesson. A child never arrives at gymnastics carrying only a leotard and a water bottle. They also arrive with the week they have just lived.

Recovery is not one event that happens after training. In sport science, it is understood as an individual and changing process involving physical and psychological demands, together with the opportunities available to recover from them^[1].

THE STORY SO FAR

Issue 1: Recovery is part of training.

Issue 2: Adaptation continues after the session.

Issue 3: Sleep creates a recurring opportunity to recover.

Issue 4: The whole week shapes the context in which the next lesson begins.

School

Travel

Play

Home



CHELSEA EXPLAINS

“My gymnastics lesson does not begin with an empty week. School, journeys, play, feelings and everything else arrive with me.”

ONE CHILD · MANY DEMANDS

A lesson is one part of the week

MON School <i>play · homework</i>	TUE School <i>travel · gym</i>	WED School <i>PE · family</i>	THU School <i>activity · homework</i>	FRI School <i>gym · journey</i>	SAT Play <i>family · rest</i>	SUN Home <i>prepare · pause</i>
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A gymnastics class may occupy only one or two points in a child’s timetable. Around it sit many other experiences: school, physical education, playground activity, another sport, family commitments, journeys, meals, homework, friendships, excitement and disappointment.

These experiences are not interchangeable. A maths lesson is not the same as a gymnastics session, and a bus journey is not exercise. But each can use time, attention or emotional energy. Together they form the context in which the child reaches the gym.

- A POSSIBLE SEVEN-DAY VIEW
- **Monday:** school · playground · homework
 - **Tuesday:** school · journey · gymnastics · journey home
 - **Wednesday:** school · physical education · family evening
 - **Thursday:** school · another activity · homework
 - **Friday:** school · gymnastics · later evening meal
 - **Saturday:** play · family plans · rest
 - **Sunday:** ordinary home life · preparation for school

No two family weeks look exactly alike. Nor does the same family repeat an identical week. A school performance, an illness in the household, a birthday, a changed journey or a demanding piece of homework may alter the rhythm without changing the printed timetable.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

The gymnastics lesson is visible, but it is not the whole picture. Begin with the week—not with a judgement about the child.

PHYSICAL · COGNITIVE · EMOTIONAL · LOGISTICAL

What does the week ask of a child?



In sport science, the word **load** is often used to describe what is asked of an athlete and how that demand is experienced. In this magazine, it is a descriptive word—not a grade, diagnosis or warning label.

PHYSICAL DEMAND

Gymnastics, physical education, playground games, walking and other sports all involve movement. Their demands differ, but the body experiences the complete pattern rather than filing each activity into a separate box.

ATTENTION AND LEARNING

A school day may require listening, remembering, problem-solving and self-control. Gymnastics also asks a child to follow instructions, orientate the body in space, respond to feedback and make quick decisions.

EMOTION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Excitement can energise a child. Worry, conflict, disappointment or uncertainty can make it harder to settle. These are ordinary human experiences, not evidence that the child lacks resilience.

TIME AND LOGISTICS

Journeys, changes between caregivers, rushed transitions and a compressed evening may reduce the time available to eat, pause, talk or arrive calmly.

British Gymnastics’ current Training & Holistic Development policy explicitly identifies fatigue, concentration, exams, additional stressors, social events and other activities as circumstances that may require planned training to be adapted^[2].

EVIDENCE NOTE

The categories above help families describe context. They cannot be added together to produce a medical or “readiness” score.

A SNAPSHOT IS NOT A VERDICT

Why a familiar skill may feel different

TUESDAY A

manageable school day

smooth journey

SETTLES QUICKLY

TUESDAY B

demanding school day

delayed journey

NEEDS MORE TIME

SAME CHILD · FAMILIAR CLASS · DIFFERENT CONTEXT

Consider two Tuesdays.

TUESDAY A

The school day felt manageable. The journey ran smoothly. There was time for the family’s usual food and drink routine. The child enters the gym ready to talk, watches the demonstration and joins in confidently.

TUESDAY B

School felt unusually demanding. The journey was delayed. Homework is still waiting. The child enters quietly, needs longer to settle and hesitates on a skill that looked comfortable the week before.

The second lesson does not prove that ability has disappeared. Performance naturally varies, and one observation can have many possible explanations. The useful response is curiosity: *What might be different today?*

Research on training-load monitoring in adolescents shows why simple conclusions are unsafe. A systematic review found that relationships between single load measures and changes in physical qualities, injury or illness were generally limited or inconsistent^[3]. A separate review of female youth athletes described monitoring as an emerging area and highlighted important limitations in validity, reliability and practical use^[4].

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

Most of this research involves competitive adolescents, not primary-school children in recreational gymnastics. It supports caution and context; it does **not** validate a home test for deciding whether a young child is “ready.”



CHELSEA EXPLAINS

“One difficult turn does not erase what I have learned. Give me time to settle, listen and try again.”

WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER?

The part of the day the coach did not see



The coach sees the child from the moment they enter the gym. The family may hold useful context from the hours or days before it.

SCHOOL

A full day of lessons, concentration and social interaction may affect how quickly a child engages with another learning environment. This does not mean that school work and physical training create the same biological demand. It means that attention is part of the child’s real day.

MOVEMENT BEYOND GYMNASTICS

Physical education, playground games, walking, cycling and another sport all contribute movement experiences. For most children, varied activity is a positive part of life. The point is not to restrict ordinary play; it is to avoid pretending that only organised gymnastics “counts.”

HOME AND FAMILY LIFE

Homework, celebrations, appointments, caring arrangements and changes in routine may alter the pace of the evening. A child may also arrive very excited—an emotional state that can change attention just as tiredness can.

FOOD AND SLEEP

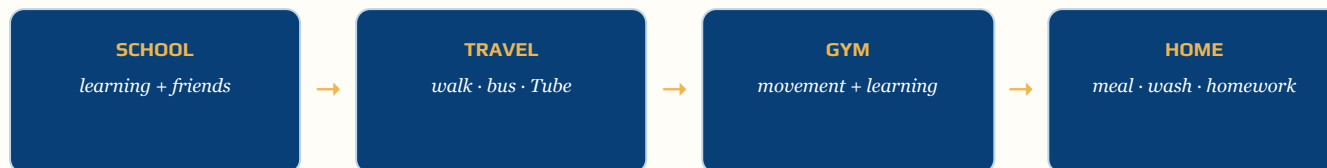
Food and sleep remain important parts of recovery, but they have already received dedicated treatment in this series. Here, they belong inside the weekly picture rather than becoming another checklist. Families do not need to construct a perfect recovery routine before every class.

TALK TO THE COACH

Useful context is brief and factual: “It has been an unusually full day,” or “She says she feels more tired than usual.” The purpose is to inform—not to predict the lesson.

WHEN THE TIMETABLE IS NOT THE WHOLE STORY

The journey also takes time



For many London families, an after-school activity involves more than leaving one building and entering another.

A child may finish school, meet a parent or carer, walk to a bus stop, change trains, sit in traffic or cross the city between home, school and the gym. A sibling may need collecting. A parent may be moving between work and family responsibilities. When the lesson ends, the return journey, evening meal, washing, homework and bedtime still remain.

Travel should not be described as equivalent to gymnastics training. Its importance is different: it can consume time, complicate transitions and shape how hurried or settled the family feels on arrival.

British Gymnastics’ policy asks training providers to consider education commitments, travel time, meals and sleep when planning physical and psychological rest and recovery^[2]. That is a useful reminder that the timetable around training matters as well as the session itself.

LONDON REALITY

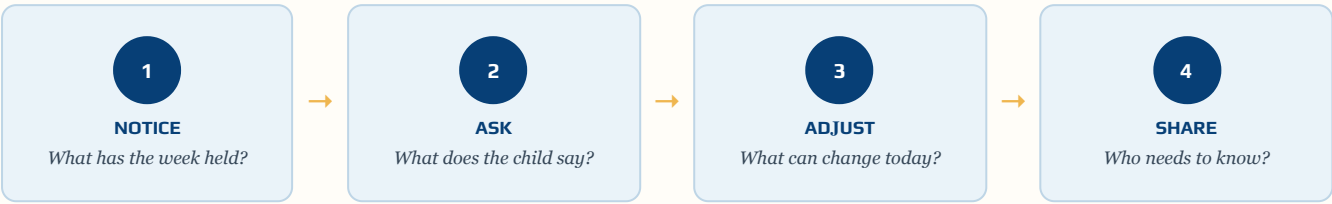
A delayed bus or crowded journey is not a recovery failure. Families cannot control every part of city life. Clear communication and a calm arrival may be more realistic than trying to “optimise” the whole evening.

WHAT MAY HELP

- Leave a little transition time where the family can realistically do so.
- Keep the usual practical routines simple rather than adding “recovery work.”
- Tell the coach when the day has been markedly different.
- Avoid turning one rushed journey into a judgement about the child’s commitment.

A CALMER CONVERSATION

Four questions are enough



Families do not need a dashboard, wearable target or daily questionnaire. A short conversation can provide more humane context.

1 · WHAT HAS THE WEEK HELD?

Notice anything clearly different: illness, an unusually demanding day, disrupted travel, a major event, another strenuous activity or a significant change in routine.

2 · WHAT DOES THE CHILD SAY?

Ask an open question: “How are you feeling about gymnastics today?” Listen without supplying the answer. Children may say they are tired, excited, worried, sore—or completely fine.

3 · WHAT CAN BE ADJUSTED TODAY?

Families can adjust pressure and expectations. Decisions about lesson content belong to the coach, who can observe how the child settles and adapt teaching where appropriate.

4 · WHO NEEDS TO KNOW?

Share information that affects participation or safety. British Gymnastics’ policy emphasises regular collaboration with gymnasts and parents or carers, together with adaptable training that prioritises the individual gymnast^[2].

A USEFUL EXCHANGE

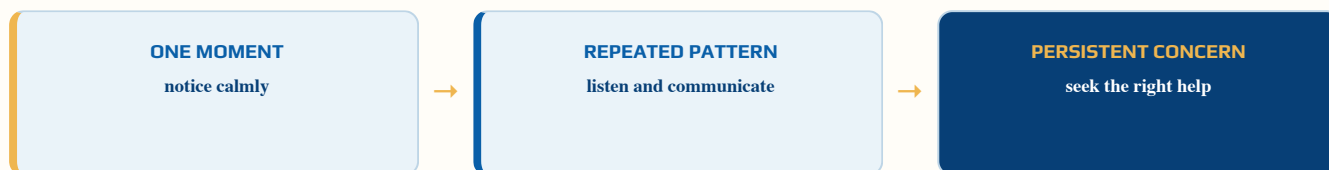
Child: “School felt hard today and my legs feel heavy.” **Parent to coach:** “It has been an unusually full day. Could you see how they settle?” **Coach:** “Thank you. We will begin, listen and adapt if needed.”

COMPETITIVE LENS

For a gymnast attending several sessions each week, communication may need to be more planned. The coach—not the family alone—should interpret training history alongside the gymnast’s experience. Monitoring tools used in high-performance sport should not become a home grading system for a child^[3,4,5].

OBSERVE WITHOUT DIAGNOSING

One sign can have many explanations



A child may occasionally:

- say that they feel more tired than usual;
- need longer to settle into the class;
- appear quieter, more emotional or more hesitant;
- find an ordinary task harder than it felt last week;
- report soreness, discomfort or reduced enthusiasm;
- ask for a break or say that they do not feel well.

None of these observations, alone, identifies a cause. They do not allow a parent or magazine to diagnose under-recovery, overtraining, injury, nutritional inadequacy or a sleep disorder. They are prompts to listen and consider the wider context.

WHEN TO SEEK ADVICE

Persistent or recurring pain, marked fatigue, repeated illness, breathing difficulty, significant distress, a major change in participation, or any concern about a child's health or safety deserves appropriate attention. Speak with the coach about participation and seek advice from a suitably qualified healthcare professional when the concern is medical.

Paediatric guidance distinguishes ordinary short-term tiredness from longer patterns in which training demand repeatedly exceeds the opportunity to recover; those more serious conditions require proper professional assessment rather than a family checklist^[6].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Notice patterns, listen to the child and use the right source of help. A calm observation is useful; an improvised diagnosis is not.

THE WHOLE WEEK WITHOUT PERFECTIONISM

Five calmer views

“A difficult lesson means the child is going backwards.”

A calmer view: One lesson is a snapshot. Skills and confidence can look different from day to day without erasing longer-term learning.

“If the timetable is the same, readiness should be the same.”

A calmer view: The printed timetable does not show everything the child experienced, thought or felt during the week.

“A recovery product can fix a demanding week.”

A calmer view: No drink, device, supplement or treatment replaces ordinary time, communication and appropriate professional care when it is needed.

“The coach should push through every tired day.”

A calmer view: Good coaching responds to the gymnast in front of the coach. British Gymnastics requires planned training to remain flexible and adaptable to individual circumstances^[2].

“One number can tell us whether a child is recovered.”

A calmer view: Even in adolescent competitive sport, single load measures have important limitations^[3,4]. Families of young recreational gymnasts do not need to score the child.

COMPETITIVE LENS

British Gymnastics’ March 2025 policy requires gymnasts within its scope to have at least one day each week away from structured gymnastics training. It also requires rest and recovery to be planned daily, weekly and annually^[2]. For gymnasts with a substantial training schedule, this planning belongs in an open partnership between gymnast, family, coach and, where necessary, qualified health or performance professionals.

CONTEXT BEFORE CONCLUSION

The child brings the whole week

The most important change is not another recovery task. It is a better question.

Instead of asking, “Why is my child not performing as well today?” begin with: “What has this week held, and what is my child telling us?”

That question leaves room for ordinary variation. It helps the family share useful context without surveillance. It allows the coach to observe and adapt. And it keeps persistent health concerns in the hands of appropriately qualified professionals.

Gymnastics can be an important, joyful part of childhood. Recovery protects that wider view: the child is not only a performer during a lesson, but a growing person moving through school, family life, friendships, journeys and rest.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

A gymnastics lesson is one part of a child’s week. Share the context, listen to the child and judge patterns—not one imperfect session.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

Issue 5 — Growth changes the question If the same week can feel different, what happens when the child’s body itself is changing quickly?

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Gymnastics for Life

Masters & Lifelong Movement

Masters Gymnastics: a British championship with a future

From the first Veterans Championships in 1987 to a record-entry national event in 2026, Britain has built something remarkable. The next step is to give its age-group pathway the name—and recognition—it deserves.

EDITOR'S FIELD REPORT • DR STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV • LILLESHALL, 14 JUNE 2026

In June, I returned to Lilleshall National Sports Centre for my fourth consecutive Adult Gymnastics British Championships. The youngest competitor was 18; the oldest was 73. Across Artistic, Tumbling, Trampoline and Acro, the weekend brought beginners, returners and experienced competitors into one national event^[3].

That breadth is precisely why this championship matters. It shows that gymnastics can remain serious, social and adaptable long after childhood. It also raises an important question: does the word *Adult* describe the whole pathway clearly enough?

This chapter reports the championship from inside it, then makes a constructive case for a formal British Masters Gymnastics identity. The argument is not that “Adult” is wrong. It is that *Adult alone is incomplete*.

EDITOR'S NOTE

I competed for Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy while reporting this chapter. Personal photographs document one participant's route through the weekend; event-wide claims, scores and historical statements are checked separately against official sources.



EDITOR'S FIELD REPORT • LILLESHALL

Dr Stefan Kolimechkov competes on still rings for Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy at the 2026 Adult Gymnastics British Championships.

Copyright: British Gymnastics • Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

NEARLY FOUR DECADES OF BRITISH GYMNASTICS

The event began with a belief that gymnastics should continue

BRITAIN'S LIFELONG GYMNASTICS EVENT

A documented line of continuity

1985

John White appointed National Coach for recreational gymnastics

1987

First Veterans Championships

2019

Official results use the Adult Gymnastics British Championships title

2026

Record entries · ages 18–73

British Gymnastics’ own historical record credits John White with introducing the Veterans Championships. Appointed National Coach for recreational gymnastics in 1985, he helped establish the first event in 1987^[1].

The name *Veterans* belonged to its era. What endured was more important: adults still wanted to train, perform, compete and meet others who understood why the sport remained part of their lives.

A DOCUMENTED LINE OF CONTINUITY

- **1985** · John White became National Coach for recreational gymnastics.
- **1987** · The first Veterans Championships took place.
- **2019** · Official result sheets were using the title *Adult Gymnastics British Championships* at Lilleshall^[2].
- **2026** · British Gymnastics reported more competitors than ever before, with ages spanning 18 to 73^[3].

WHAT THE PUBLIC RECORD DOES NOT ESTABLISH

KGM found clear official evidence for the 1987 beginning and the modern Adult title, but not an authoritative British Gymnastics source stating the exact date or formal rationale for the renaming. It would therefore be wrong to repeat an attractive explanation as fact simply because it appears plausible.

The defensible history is still powerful: the event has survived a change of name, expanded its reach and remained rooted in the idea that gymnastics can continue across adult life.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

This is a historical record, not an edition count. Interruptions and format changes mean KGM will not label 2026 the “40th championship” without an official event-by-event archive.

ONE EVENT · MANY ROUTES INTO THE SPORT

A championship built across adulthood

18

YOUNGEST COMPETITOR

73

OLDEST COMPETITOR

4

DISCIPLINES

70+

BRITISH CHAMPIONS



ONE WEEKEND · MANY HISTORIES

Across the apparatus floor at Lilleshall, gymnasts from different clubs and competitive categories shared the same national event.

Editor's archive.

British Gymnastics describes its national event as open to anyone who is 18 in the year of competition or older—whether taking first steps in gymnastics or returning to the sport^[4].

The 2026 handbook organised competition through age divisions and ability levels. Depending on discipline, these included Introductory, Novice, Intermediate and Pro categories. The official event report recorded more entries than ever before, more than 70 British champions and competitors from 18 to 73 across Artistic, Tumbling, Trampoline and Acro^[3,4].

From inside the Kings Gym, the value of that structure was visible. A national championship could hold serious routines and first competitions in the same weekend without pretending they were identical experiences.

WHY ADULT REMAINS USEFUL

- It clearly opens the door at 18.
- It includes people learning as adults as well as former competitors returning.
- It supports several disciplines, ability levels and social participation.
- It matches the language used by many clubs for their 18+ sessions.

The social side is not evidence of lesser sport. It can be one reason adults continue through work, family commitments, injury history and changing capacity. But an inclusive participation umbrella does not remove the need for a more specific name for age-group competitive gymnastics.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

A child seeing adults from 18 to 73 compete can imagine a future in which gymnastics remains part of life, even when the route changes.

ADULT WELCOMES · MASTERS RECOGNISES

Britain should use both words—and give each a clear job

ADULT GYMNASTICS

THE 18+ UMBRELLA

Beginners · returners · social gymnasts · performers · competitors

MASTERS GYMNASTICS

THE AGE-GROUP PATHWAY

Proposed 30+ competitive identity · age bands · progression · recognition



KGM PROPOSES

Adult Gymnastics British Championships

incorporating the British Masters Gymnastics divisions

In scientific literature, *Masters athletes* are adults who continue systematic training and organised competition in sport designed for older age groups. Researchers use Masters sport as a recognised context for studying ageing, function, identity and continued participation^[7,8].

International sport also shows that *Masters* does not mean one universal age. World Rowing begins at 27 and includes recreational rowers as well as serious regatta competitors^[6]. The shared idea is organised sport continuing through age-group competition—not a claim that every participant is elite.

The evidence therefore supports two conclusions.

1 · ADULT IS THE PARTICIPATION UMBRELLA

Keep *Adult Gymnastics* for the full 18+ community: beginners, returners, social gymnasts, performers and competitors.

2 · MASTERS IS THE AGE-GROUP SPORTING PATHWAY

Use *Masters Gymnastics* for age-graded lifelong competition—most naturally from 30+ within the current British structure. The term should not imply elite status, long experience or exclusion of recreational competitors. It should describe an age-group pathway with appropriate rules, recognition and progression.

KGM'S PROPOSED NATIONAL WORDING

Adult Gymnastics British Championships — incorporating the British Masters Gymnastics divisions

This would protect the welcoming 18+ identity while placing the Over-30, Over-40 and Over-50 competitive pathway within terminology already understood by researchers and international sport. British Gymnastics itself already refers to the international *Masters World Cup* when reporting British adult gymnasts^[3].

EDITORIAL POSITION

The evidence does not support replacing every use of *Adult* with *Masters*. It supports ending the use of *Adult* as the only term. A formal Masters pathway would strengthen continuity, international alignment and the visibility of ageing well through gymnastics.

FOUR EVENTS · A DEVELOPING IDENTITY

From a bilateral match to an international Masters pathway

EARLIER STEPS 2019 · idea discussed in Japan → 2022 · Germany–Japan seniors match			
2023 EINBECK  Germany Masters Team World Cup	2024 CAMBRIDGE  United States Team + individual World Cup	2025 LEIPZIG  Germany International Masters Team Cup	2026 CAMBRIDGE  United States Individual World Cup

GYMmedia traces the modern artistic-gymnastics pathway to an idea discussed in Japan in 2019 and a bilateral Germany–Japan seniors match in Tokyo in 2022^[19].

The wider sequence then took shape through four organiser-led international events:

- **2023 · Einbeck, Germany** — a four-nation Masters Team World Cup^[16].
- **2024 · Cambridge, United States** — a Masters Gymnastics World Cup with team and individual competition^[17].
- **2025 · Leipzig, Germany** — the International Masters Team Cup^[5,19].
- **2026 · Cambridge, United States** — a Masters Gymnastics Individual World Cup^[18].

The host titles and formats vary, but age 30+, international participation and a developing Masters Code connect the events. Together, they show a community trying to build continuity across years even while the format changes.

The reviewed documents do not establish a FIG-sanctioned World Cup circuit or an official world championship. KGM therefore describes this as the clearest emerging international pathway for Masters artistic gymnastics—not as a formally recognised global title.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

The sequence is historically important, but its status must be described precisely. “International pathway” is supported; “official world championship” is not.

A NATIONAL SILVER FOR KCGA

I came to report the event—and to compete within it

The 2026 championships marked my fourth consecutive appearance, following 2023, 2024 and 2025.

In the MAG Pro Over-30 all-around, the official results placed Tomas Warwick first with 45.050, me second with 44.600 and Suryava Bhattacharya third with 41.250^[9].

OFFICIAL ALL-AROUND RESULT

- **1 • Tomas Warwick** — 45.050
- **2 • Stefan Kolimechkov • KCGA** — 44.600
- **3 • Suryava Bhattacharya** — 41.250

I value the silver medal because it records a real national competition. Yet the more interesting story is not one podium. It is what adults repeatedly do to arrive there: train around work and family life, modify routines, manage uncertainty and still accept the judgement of a score.

For KCGA, the result connected our Kensington gymnastics community to the national adult stage. For this report, competing also provided direct access to the rhythm of the event—the warm-up hall, the waiting, the conversations, the adjustments and the shared understanding that adult gymnastics can be both friendly and demanding.



MAG PRO OVER-30 PODIUM

Tomas Warwick, gold; Dr Stefan Kolimechkov of KCGA, silver; and Suryava Bhattacharya, bronze.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

EDITOR'S NOTE

First-person reporting makes my position visible. It does not turn one result into evidence about the whole community. Official scores are presented as verified historical records; personal reflections are identified as personal perspective.

A VERIFIED RECORD · A CONSTRUCTIVE PROPOSAL

Four consecutive first-place rings rankings



2026 · 11.800

First in the published MAG Pro Over-30 rings ranking.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern



Across the 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026 championships, the official MAG Pro Over-30 results ranked me first on still rings each year^[9,10,11,12].

THE PUBLISHED RECORD

- **2023 · 10.800** — ranked first
- **2024 · 11.500** — ranked first
- **2025 · 10.300** — ranked first
- **2026 · 11.800** — ranked first

These scores came from different competitions, fields and routines. They are not a controlled experiment and should not be used to claim linear improvement. They do establish a precise historical fact: first place in the published rings ranking at four consecutive championships.

IF AN APPARATUS IS RANKED, SHOULD IT ALSO BE RECOGNISED?

The 2026 presentation awarded my all-around silver, but no separate medal or title accompanied the first-place rings ranking. KGM believes the event should consider proportionate recognition for apparatus excellence.

Apparatus recognition respects the structure of artistic gymnastics, creates meaningful goals for specialists and allows experienced adults to adapt intelligently when a complete all-around programme is no longer the best route. Where fields are small, transparent minimum-entry rules or certificates could protect the value of recognition.

EDITORIAL BOUNDARY

“Ranked first on rings” is the exact result supported by the official sheets. KGM does not call this an apparatus championship title because none was formally awarded.

WHAT THE FLOOR ROUTINE MAKES VISIBLE

The photograph shows range. The routine requires more.

**SPLIT**

Range presented inside a complete routine.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

**Y-BALANCE**

Mobility expressed through balance and control.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

A full split or Y-balance makes mobility visible, but the largest angle is not the complete performance.

The gymnast must reach the position, organise the trunk and pelvis, maintain balance, present the shape and connect it to the choreography. Range, strength, coordination and confidence work together.

KGM WORKING DISTINCTIONS

Range of motion · How far a joint or body segment moves in a defined test or task.

Flexibility · The amount of range available, often discussed in relation to stretching or a passively reached position.

Mobility · The range a person can access and organise while performing a movement.

Useful range · Enough appropriate range for the task—with the strength and control needed to use it.

Systematic-review evidence supports stretching as one route to increased range of motion. Strength training can also increase measured range, particularly when exercises use purposeful movement through range^[13,14].

That does not mean every strength exercise improves flexibility, that stretching is unnecessary or that a larger angle automatically produces better function. Training must still answer a practical question: *which range is needed, and how must the gymnast use it?*

A CALMER VIEW

A split can be an excellent gymnastics position. It is not a complete test of an adult's mobility, joint health or ability to function.

KEEP THE INTENT · CHANGE THE ROUTE

Masters gymnastics is not a museum of old routines

**ADAPTATION IN PRACTICE**

Competitive intent remains; preparation, skill selection and the route into the movement can change.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

The purpose is not to preserve every skill exactly as it was performed at 20. The purpose is to keep training meaningful while responding honestly to current capacity.

FOUR DECISIONS I NOW MAKE MORE DELIBERATELY

Prepare before using full range Before a demanding skill, I warm up the shoulders, hips, ankles and spine in the positions that the skill will need.

Stay strong through the movement I practise moving into the position, holding it and coming out with control. Reaching the biggest shape is not the goal if I cannot control it.

Change the route when needed Support, reduced range, slower speed, fewer repetitions or a different progression can protect continuity without removing ambition.

Respond to meaningful change Persistent pain, a hot swollen joint, severe symptoms after injury or a clear loss of normal function deserve appropriate assessment^[15].

Direct research on mobility and joint health in Masters artistic gymnastics remains sparse. My experience can illustrate adaptation; it cannot prescribe how another adult should train or diagnose why a joint hurts.

LIFELONG PRINCIPLE

The goal is not to move as I did at 18. The goal is to keep moving well at every age—with enough preparation to make continued ambition possible.

THE SPORT STAYS · THE ROUTE CHANGES

Moving well means feeling organised, not merely reaching further

DR STEFAN KOLIMECHKOV Masters artistic gymnast, coach and editor of *Kensington Gymnastics Magazine*

“In my twenties, I pursued maximum mobility and flexibility on the rings with far less attention to the load placed on my shoulders. Giant swings, Yamawaki and Jonasson elements, and dismounts from handstand were all part of the gymnastics I wanted to perform. After several setbacks involving shoulder inflammation, preparation now occupies a much larger part of my training: elastic-band work, targeted weights for the shoulders and scapular area, and separate mobility-and-stability sessions before I progress to the

rings. Demanding dynamic elements are currently reduced and approached more selectively, but that does not mean that I have stopped believing some may return gradually in the future. Moving well today means feeling free from joint or muscular pain that changes the movement, feeling strong and symmetrical through the muscles involved, and experiencing that smoothness when a skill feels organised rather than forced. That is the moment when training feels inspiring again.”

WHAT ONE EXPERIENCE CAN—AND CANNOT—TELL US

My experience cannot establish how every adult should train. It can show what adaptation looks like in practice: goals, preparation and routes into familiar movement can change while competitive intent remains.

MASTERS MESSAGE

Ageing does not mean stopping. It means adapting with enough honesty to continue—and enough ambition to keep the sport meaningful.

THE SKILL CHANGES · THE COMMITMENT REMAINS

Two moments, eleven years apart



BAIL FROM HANDSTAND · 2015

The downward swing from handstand, immediately before release into a double salto backward tucked. London Gymnastics Regional Championships. Editor's archive.



DISLOCATE TO DISMOUNT · 2026

From inverted hang through a dislocate backward, then release into a backward straight salto. Adult Gymnastics British Championships.

Copyright: British Gymnastics · Photographer: John-Paul McGovern

These photographs capture two different routes into a still-rings dismount. In 2015, I am in the *bail from handstand*—the familiar coaching term for the downward swing from handstand—immediately before releasing into a double salto backward tucked. In 2026, I did not begin from handstand: from an inverted hang, I performed a dislocate backward and released into a backward straight salto. The second photograph catches that release phase, with the landing still to come.

The comparison is not a story of decline. It is a story of continuity and informed adaptation. My preparation is now more deliberate, and I choose the route and dismount that match my shoulders, current training and readiness. The 2015 dismount is not declared permanently gone; it remains a possible future goal if the preparation and conditions are right. Competitive intent remains.

MASTERS MESSAGE

Lifelong gymnastics does not require the same routine forever. It requires a meaningful route back to the apparatus, adapted to the gymnast who arrives today.

WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT

Adult welcomes. Masters recognises. Gymnastics continues.

“Masters would exclude beginners.”

A calmer view: not if Adult remains the 18+ umbrella and Masters names the age-group pathway within it.

“Masters means elite.”

A calmer view: international sport uses Masters across recreational and competitive levels, with age—not former status—providing the organising principle^[5,6].

“The name does not matter.”

A calmer view: names shape visibility, research, international connection and whether adults can recognise a continuing sporting pathway.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Britain has already built an extraordinary adult championship. Giving its age-group divisions a formal Masters Gymnastics identity would not narrow the event. Done carefully, it would explain its depth: an open door at 18, and a recognised competitive pathway through later life.

LOOKING AHEAD

In Issue 5, *Gymnastics for Life* will examine bone health, impact and intelligent loading: why bones respond to challenge, and how adult and Masters gymnastics can adapt impact without treating “harder” as automatically better.

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London & the World

Gymnastics in London

The Journey Across London

Travel, time, competition and the people behind every opportunity

EXPERT VOICE | HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN · COACH AND NATIONAL JUDGE

A gymnastics opportunity is not simply a dot on a map.

It must be suitable for the child, available at the right level, reachable at the right time and repeatable within family life. The same is true when the journey grows from a weekly class into a competition: behind every routine is a network of travel, preparation, expertise and largely unseen work.

This chapter follows that journey—from a London family planning an ordinary training day to a judge preparing to evaluate the smallest details of a routine.

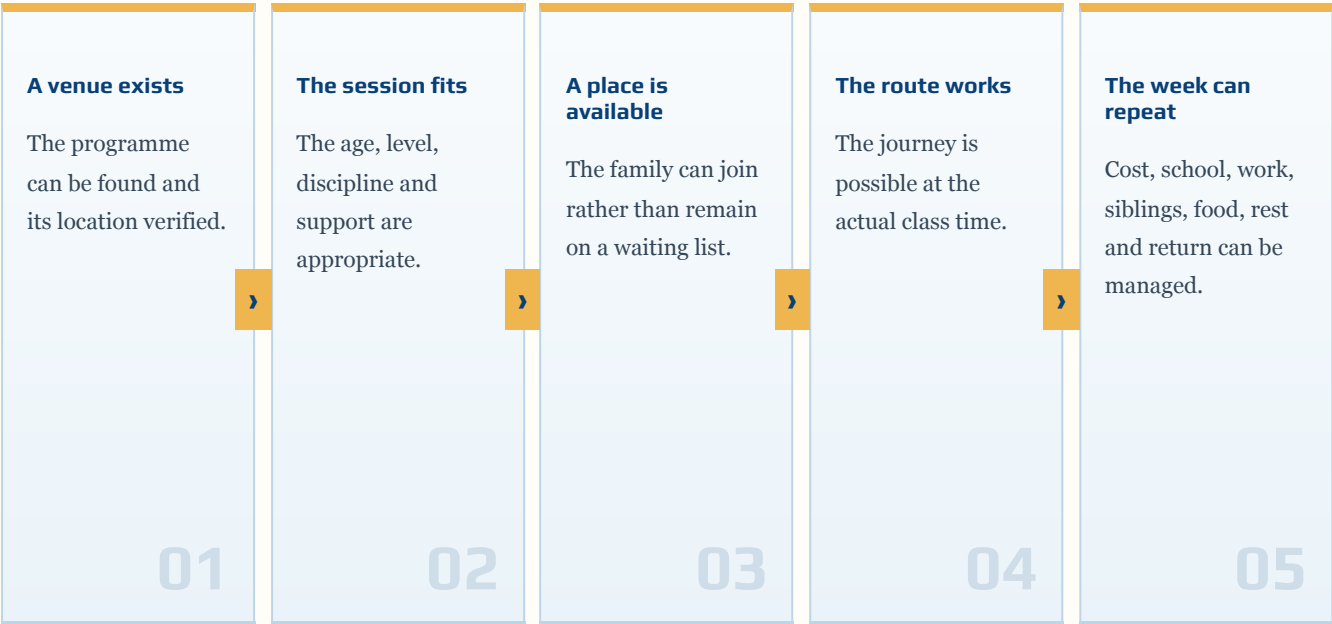
THE LONDON SERIES

- | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Issue 1 · London pathways | Issue 2 · Small spaces |
| Issue 3 · Uneven access | Issue 4 · The journey |



FROM POSSIBILITY TO PARTICIPATION

A map becomes a week



In Issue 3, Kensington Gymnastics Magazine published an original London-wide audit identifying 188 verified delivery venues operated by 120 providers^[1]. It was an important starting point—and deliberately not the final answer.

A venue point showed that public evidence of children’s gymnastics and a route to enquire or join could be found. It did not confirm a vacancy. It did not measure affordability, coaching quality, capacity, accessibility or whether the timetable worked after school.

This issue takes the next step. It asks what must happen before an advertised opportunity becomes part of a child’s real week.

ONLY THEN
The dot becomes participation.

KGM ORIGINAL FINDING
London has substantial advertised gymnastics provision, but it is distributed unevenly. The Issue 3 audit measured geographic provision; it did not measure the complete opportunity available to each child^[1].

Access is a chain. Every link has to hold.

THE ROUTE IS PART OF THE PROGRAMME

One class can organise an afternoon



For a child, the session may last an hour. For a family, gymnastics can occupy a much larger part of the day.

The relevant journey may begin at school, continue through childcare or a sibling’s activity, and end at a different home address. A workable route has to include the walk to the stop or station, waiting, interchanges, the chance of delay, changing clothes, eating at a sensible time and travelling home when the child is tired.

London’s transport scale helps explain why simple distance can mislead. Transport for London estimated 30.2 million journey stages on an average day in 2024. A journey stage is one component of a trip by a single mode; changing between some services can therefore add another stage^[2]. The number describes all London travel—not gymnastics families—but it shows the complexity through which family routines move.

TfL’s 2025 overview reported an average bus customer journey time of 34.3 minutes for its network measure^[3]. That is not a gymnastics commute and should never be presented as one. It is useful context: an apparently ordinary outward journey can already be similar in length to a substantial part of a beginner’s class, before the return trip is counted.

THE PRACTICAL QUESTION

Can our child arrive safely, calmly and with enough energy left to learn—and can our family do this again next week?

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

KGM has not measured the average travel time or cost of a London gymnastics family. The chapter uses official city-wide context and clearly labelled professional interpretation.

The family prepares for an hour of training by organising several hours of life.

LONDON IS NOT ONE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

Two equal distances can create different journeys

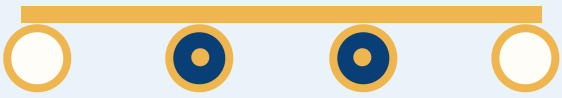
Journey A



ONE SERVICE
Frequent departures and a direct connection can make a route predictable.

SHORT FINAL WALK

Journey B



TWO CHANGES
Waiting, interchanges and the final walk can change the experience completely.

ACCESS CONSTRAINT

London routes are not measured by miles alone.

A short radial journey towards central London may have a frequent direct service. A similar distance between two outer-London areas may require two buses and a long wait. A route that looks simple for one family may be unsuitable for another because a station is not step-free, a child needs additional support, or the final walk feels different after dark.

TfL’s WebCAT planning tool reflects this distinction. It can assess public-transport access and map travel times from a location; the system treats connectivity and time as information in their own right^[4].

WHAT “NEARBY” SHOULD MEAN

- near the child’s real starting point;
- reachable at the actual weekday and hour;
- manageable in winter as well as summer;
- compatible with accessibility and support needs;
- realistic after the return journey is included.

This is why the nearest club is not always the most accessible, and why the best-known club is not automatically the most sustainable.

A FAIRER QUESTION

Which suitable opportunity can this child reach consistently without the journey overwhelming the benefit?

Nearby is not a distance alone. It is a journey a child can repeat.

A VIEW FROM THE JUDGING TABLE

Further does not automatically mean better

“*Travelling far is a major commitment, but the distance does not guarantee the result. Some competitions become benchmarks for coaches and gymnasts, so clubs travel because of the event’s set-up, the level of judging or the value they place on obtaining a score there.*

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]



Families sometimes travel considerable distances for specialist coaching or a competition that has become important within a discipline. The commitment is real. The result is never guaranteed.

Hariesh Jegatheepan has judged at competitions across the country. His professional observation is that distance itself should not be mistaken for a performance advantage.

This is not a statistical finding about all competitors. It is an experienced judge’s warning against confusing sacrifice with certainty.

THE VALUE OF A JOURNEY

A long journey may be entirely worthwhile. Its value comes from a clear purpose and a positive experience, not from mileage.

Purpose gives the journey value. Distance does not.

FROM ONE HOUR A WEEK TO THE JUDGING TABLE

Hariesh Jegatheepan



Hariesh Jegatheepan. Courtesy of Hariesh Jegatheepan, personal archive.

LEAD COACH · COACHING CONSULTANT · NATIONAL WAG AND MAG JUDGE

Hariesh’s route into gymnastics did not begin with an elite plan. It began with one recreational hour a week after his sister joined the sport.

His approved biography identifies him as Lead Coach of Hillingdon Artistic and a coaching consultant. He is a national judge in Women’s Artistic Gymnastics (WAG) and Men’s Artistic Gymnastics (MAG), with judging experience in Trampoline Gymnastics and Acrobatic Gymnastics. He also leads the British University Gymnastics League and works across a range of gymnastics projects^[5].

His recent judging experience includes the English and Welsh Championships and the 2025 Gypmies GymnovaCup in Belgium. That range gives him a useful view of both ends of the journey: how gymnasts are prepared in the gym, and what becomes visible when a routine reaches the judging table.

Recreational gymnast	Lead coach
WAG & MAG judge	League leader

ONE HOUR A WEEK

“I told my parents, ‘Put me in gymnastics—I’ll be better than her.’ They did, and I kept going until I was 16. From there I moved into coaching and judging. I hope my story shows that wherever you start, hard work, dedication and passion can shape where you go”^[5].

- WHY HIS VOICE BELONGS HERE
- He began as a once-a-week recreational gymnast.
 - He progressed through coaching and several judging disciplines.
 - He works within London’s club community.
 - He has judged in Britain and internationally.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTE

Hariesh’s roles and qualifications are presented from his approved biography. His final edited contribution will be returned to him for approval before publication.

PROFESSIONAL OBSERVATION

A large community that still feels like a family

“ People can underestimate how connected the gymnastics world is. The relationships between clubs, coaches, judges and organisers can influence how smoothly and pleasantly a competition runs. I understand how important it is to maintain good relationships across the country.

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

Judging has taken Hariesh to competitions across the UK. The most powerful lesson, he says, has not been about deductions. It has been about relationships.

In London, that network becomes practical. Hariesh describes visiting Croydon and Hendon with his gymnasts, sharing training, working alongside other coaches and lending judging expertise. He has received mentorship from clubs and coaches and, in turn, has supported events and colleagues.

This does not mean that everyone agrees, or that professional standards should be replaced by friendship. It means that a technical sport still depends on people being willing to communicate, help and learn across organisational boundaries.

“ We are a vast community, but we are still part of the same family. We have common ground—and that is why we can be close even when we come from different clubs and parts of the country.

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

Shared learning

Coaches and judges can compare interpretations and improve understanding.

Joint opportunity

Gymnasts can encounter different facilities, people and training environments.

Stronger events

Experienced people can step forward where expertise or practical help is needed.

A wider pathway

One club does not need to contain every possible experience for every gymnast.

THE NETWORK TRAVELS TOO

For a London family, the visible journey may be from home to one club. The child's opportunity can be supported by knowledge, mentorship, judging and goodwill moving across the city.

BEFORE THE FIRST ROUTINE

The event families rarely see



Judges at the 2025 Gympies GymnovaCup in Keerbergen, Belgium, a World Gymnastics-approved international Women's Artistic Gymnastics tournament. Hariesh Jegatheepan records that the group includes judges from ten delegations. Courtesy of Hariesh Jegatheepan, personal archive.

By the time spectators sit down, much of the competition has already happened.

The venue has been booked. Entries and timetables have been processed. Equipment has been delivered, assembled, checked and adjusted. Officials have been recruited and briefed. Technical systems have been prepared. Medical cover and safety procedures have been arranged. Scores must be recorded and results produced. When the final gymnast leaves, the work is not finished.

Hariesh wants that largely invisible team to be recognised.

“ I would put a spotlight on the volunteers and technicians who make competitions possible. These are roles you may not think about until they are missing. Competition day is about the gymnast, but the days before and after belong to the crew getting the event up and running. **HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN**^[5]

British Gymnastics describes judges as being at the heart of gymnastics competitions^[6]. The London WAG handbook places health, safety and welfare at the centre of event delivery^[7].

AN INTERNATIONAL JUDGING ROOM

World Gymnastics records the Gympies GymnovaCup as an approved international WAG tournament held from 7 to 9 November 2025^[8]. The organiser reported 18 countries, 25 delegations and more than 100 gymnasts^[9]. Hariesh identifies the pictured group as judges from ten delegations—a reminder that international competition also brings technical traditions together around the same Code^[5].

ORGANISERS	OFFICIALS	TECHNICIANS	MEDICAL TEAMS
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QUALIFICATION · PRACTICE · RESPONSIBILITY

A judging pathway is built



Hariesh first stepped forward because his club needed a judge in another discipline.

“The club had Acrobatic Gymnastics but no judge. I had no experience in Acro at the time, but I am someone who will put myself forward when an opportunity appears. I completed the course, passed and discovered that I loved judging—from the technical side to the routines being presented, almost like a problem waiting to be solved.”

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

University gymnastics later led him into Men’s and Women’s Artistic judging. He continued taking courses, seeking experience and progressing until he gained national qualifications in both disciplines^[5].

There is no single identical ladder for every form of gymnastics. Requirements vary by discipline, qualification level and judging cycle. The current British Gymnastics Women’s Artistic pathway provides a useful example.

For Cycle 16 (2025–2028), the Regional Judge page describes a direct online assessment route for eligible Club Judges. Candidates are advised to study the discipline handbook and international Code, spend time recognising skills in the gym and seek advice from coaches and judges. Assessment covers element recognition, difficulty and execution^[10].

British Gymnastics strongly recommends practical consolidation at Club level before Regional responsibilities. Progression is therefore more than passing one examination. The course supplies formal knowledge; repeated experience helps a judge apply that knowledge reliably in real routines^[10].

HARIESH’S ADVICE

“The real-life skill comes from experience at competitions. Regions can be very good at helping judges through their courses. Once you start judging, the sport has a way of drawing you further in”^[5].

THE DETAILS INSIDE THE ROUTINE

A clean shape is never “just basic”

					
Shape Clear and controlled positions.	Alignment Organised body segments.	Amplitude Expected height or angle.	Extension Knees, hips, shoulders and feet.	Landing Rotation, balance and control.	Repetition Small faults can accumulate.

Spectators naturally notice the biggest skill, the fall or the landing. A judge watches the entire exercise and repeatedly compares what is performed with the requirements of the relevant rules.

The precise system changes by discipline and competition level. In Women’s Artistic Gymnastics, the 2025–2028 international Code includes execution considerations such as body alignment in handstand and cast-to-handstand positions, extension in kips, amplitude of casts and the completion angle of elements^[11]. Domestic and developmental competitions may use adapted rules, so an international deduction should not be copied automatically into every children’s event.

Hariesh’s central message is broader than any one deduction table:

“The biggest thing judges look for is good, clean body shape. If a gymnast cannot yet hold a well-aligned handstand on the wall or floor, it is unlikely that the same shape will appear automatically inside a moving skill. Parents may remember the exciting element, while the judge also sees the foundations around it.

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

This is why foundation work remains visible at every level. Difficulty gives the routine content; execution shows how securely that content is owned.

FOR FAMILIES

If a score is difficult to understand, ask the coach to explain the main learning points after the event. Judges must concentrate on their role during competition, but clubs can create appropriate opportunities for judging knowledge to enter the gym.

FAIR JUDGING · HUMAN EXPERIENCE

The score must be independent. The environment must still be kind.

The judge

Scores the performance impartially and meets professional standards of conduct.

ONE CHILD · S EXPERIENCE

The coach

Prepares realistic expectations, supports emotion and turns the result into future learning.

Hariesh draws an important distinction. A judge's numerical decision must be impartial; it cannot be adjusted to protect a hoped-for placing. A coach, meanwhile, has an ongoing relationship with the gymnast and can prepare expectations before the event, support emotion during it and turn the result into useful future training.

“As a coach, I try to make the purpose realistic: perhaps we are going for experience, to try a new skill or to practise competing. The coach has a major role in how the gymnast understands the day and what the score means.

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

Evidence from youth sport supports the importance of the wider motivational climate, although it should not be reduced to one adult or one competition. A 2026 meta-analysis of 177 studies found that motivational climate was associated most strongly with young people's motivation and cognition, with smaller associations for emotion and wellbeing, engagement, performance and health. The studies were highly varied, so the findings describe a broad pattern rather than a guaranteed effect for an individual gymnast^[12].

Impartial scoring and humane conduct are not opposites. British Gymnastics' standards apply to coaches, instructors and officials, including judges^[13]. The London Women's Artistic Event Safeguarding & Conduct Protocol, effective from May 2026, applies to athletes, coaches, judges, committee members, volunteers, visitors and spectators. It calls for a safe, respectful and professional environment and appropriate communication without aggression, intimidation or hostility^[14].

“Young gymnasts are impressionable. It is in all our interests to be friendly and open and to help them through the competition experience. I have made the mistake in the past of being too strict or appearing scary. I have grown from that and adjusted how I see the role.

HARIESH JEGATHEEPAN^[5]

KGM EDITORIAL POSITION

A fair score belongs to the performance. A positive experience belongs to the culture adults create around it. The child should never have to carry the adults' frustration.

WHAT FAMILIES CAN CARRY FORWARD

Make the journey serve the child

London gymnastics is held together by more than venues. It depends on families repeating weekly journeys; coaches planning appropriate learning; judges developing technical expertise; and organisers, volunteers, technicians and medical staff turning an empty hall into a competition.

Before committing, ask whether the opportunity is suitable now, whether the real route can repeat, why travelling further is worthwhile and how the result will be explained afterwards. A score should become useful training information—not a judgement of the child.

The destination matters. So does what the journey asks of the child and what the child carries home.

CLOSING THOUGHT

A route becomes worthwhile when it leads not only to a building or a score, but to an experience a child can learn from and wants to repeat.

Image credits

Harish Jegatheepan portrait and Gypies GymnovaCup judges group: Courtesy of Harish Jegatheepan, personal archive.

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EDITORIAL EVIDENCE NOTE This chapter distinguishes official records and published evidence from KGM original findings, Harish Jegatheepan’s professional observations and KGM editorial interpretation. The interview has been lightly edited for length, clarity and house style without changing its intended meaning. Contributor credentials and the “ten delegations” image detail are contributor-supplied. Technical scoring statements are limited to points verified in the cited 2025–2028 WAG Code and are not presented as universal rules for every domestic competition level.

London & the World

The World of Gymnastics

One Sport, Two Great Traditions

Why Men's and Women's Artistic Gymnastics Use Six and Four Apparatus

At a major artistic gymnastics competition, the men move through six apparatus: Floor Exercise, Pommel Horse, Still Rings, Vault, Parallel Bars and Horizontal Bar. The women compete on four: Vault, Uneven Bars, Balance Beam and Floor Exercise^[1].

Those numbers are more than a timetable. They are the recognisable shape of two great competitive traditions within one sport.

Much of the men's apparatus lineage reaches back to Athens 1896. Women entered Olympic gymnastics in 1928, and their familiar four-apparatus programme crystallised during the middle of the twentieth century^[2-5].

Since the 1950s, the six and four have remained remarkably stable. Equipment, Codes and skills continued to evolve; each generation inherited the apparatus—and found new possibilities within them.

Building the series

Issue 1 · The world stage

Issue 2 · Why gymnastics superpowers emerge

Issue 3 · How children begin around the world

Issue 4 · How two great apparatus traditions endured



A TRADITION VISIBLE FROM THE BEGINNING

Athens 1896



Pommel Horse



Still Rings



Vault



Parallel Bars



Horizontal Bar



Rope Climbing

Gymnastics stood on the programme when the modern Olympic Games opened in Athens in April 1896. Seventy-one men from nine nations competed^[2].

Five apparatus familiar from today's men's programme were already represented: Pommel Horse, Still Rings, Vault, Parallel Bars and Horizontal Bar.

Floor Exercise had not yet joined them. Rope Climbing was included, and team contests were held on Parallel Bars and Horizontal Bar^[2, 3].

Athens therefore did not present a finished version of modern artistic gymnastics. It gave the sport a visible beginning. The apparatus, formats and rules would be tested and refined over the decades that followed.

What is striking is not that everything was already complete. It is that a family watching gymnastics today can still recognise so much of what those first Olympic gymnasts encountered.

THEN AND NOW

Then: open-air competition, early apparatus, no settled modern programme.

Now: specialised equipment, detailed Codes and an international six-apparatus structure.

TRADITION MARKER

Five present-day men's apparatus have an Olympic lineage extending back to Athens 1896.

A STRUCTURE FORMED OVER TIME

The six were formed—not simply announced

1909

Still Rings

Return permanently to the World programme.

1932

Olympic Floor

Individual event in Los Angeles.

1934

World Floor

First included at the World Championships.

1936

Six finals

Berlin presents the recognisable structure.

1952

Modern age

Helsinki and today's six apparatus.

Early international gymnastics did not follow one permanent formula. Competitions experimented with rope climbing, club swinging, team systems and even activities that would later sit outside artistic gymnastics^[2, 3].

Across the first decades of the twentieth century, the apparatus identity became clearer.

Still Rings returned permanently to the World Championship programme in 1909 after earlier disagreement about swinging and still versions of the apparatus^[6]. Floor Exercise became an official men's event in 1930, made its individual Olympic debut in 1932 and entered the World Championships in 1934^[1, 3, 16].

Berlin 1936 used Team, All-Around and six individual apparatus finals—the structure World Gymnastics describes as the continuing standard^[3]. Its history page identifies Helsinki 1952 as the beginning of the modern age with today's six apparatus^[4].

There is no need to force one artificial birthday. By the 1930s, the six-apparatus structure was recognisable; by the post-war era, it had become the mature international programme inherited today.

A LIVING SYSTEM

The apparatus stayed. The routines did not stand still.

AN APPARATUS INHERITANCE

The men's six



Floor Exercise

Power, tumbling, balance, mobility and control in one continuous performance.



Pommel Horse

Circles, flairs and scissors while the hands repeatedly redirect the body.



Still Rings

Swing and handstand work connected with strength positions that appear motionless.



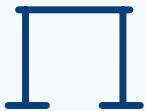
Vault

Running speed transformed into height, rotation, flight and landing.



Parallel Bars

Support, hang, swing, flight and handstand positions between two rails.



Horizontal Bar

Enormous swing, release, return and a high-flying dismount.

Each apparatus asks a different question of the gymnast^[7].

Six apparatus do not mean six versions of the same task. Together they create a broad test of acrobatics, strength, speed, balance, mobility, rhythm, spatial awareness and courage.

WORLD REALITY

An all-around gymnast studies all six. An apparatus specialist may spend years deepening a single technical language.

SIX CONVERSATIONS WITH GRAVITY

Every apparatus preserves a distinct technical culture inside the same sport.

A HISTORIC ENTRANCE

Amsterdam 1928

Before

Displays, not official competition

Women were present in Olympic gymnastics, but not yet as official competitors.

1928

The door opens

Women enter Olympic competition through a team event.

Next

A programme must form

The sport still needs a consistent apparatus identity.

Women first competed officially in Olympic gymnastics at Amsterdam in 1928. Their opportunity was limited to a team competition, but their participation opened an essential new chapter in the sport's history^[3, 5].

This was not yet the modern women's all-around. The programme included horse vault, an apparatus exercise and a team drill shaped by the group-gymnastics traditions of the period. Different nations could present work on different apparatus, making the event far less standardised than competition today^[3, 8].

The significance of Amsterdam lies in both what it achieved and what remained unfinished.

Women were finally Olympic competitors. At the same time, the sport still had to decide which apparatus would define their international programme and how individual achievement would be recognised.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Celebrating the women's four also means remembering the generations who transformed a restricted beginning into one of the most watched and technically advanced programmes in world sport.

A DISTINCT TRADITION EMERGES

How the women’s four took shape

1934–38 Programme expands Vault, Beam and Floor become visible.	1936 Berlin A more consistent group of women’s events.	1950 Uneven Bars The bar apparatus develops its identity.	1952 Individual medals All-Around and the familiar four.	1956 Modern four Team Portable Apparatus ends.
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Women and men had often trained on the same equipment in the early gymnastics halls. As international competition became more formal, organisers developed a distinct women’s programme^[1, 14].

By the late 1930s, Vault, Balance Beam and Floor Exercise were visible, while Parallel Bars was beginning its transformation^[1, 9]. Uneven Parallel Bars made their first Olympic appearance in 1936^[3, 9].

At the 1950 World Championships, the bar apparatus had developed into Uneven Parallel Bars^[1]. Helsinki 1952 awarded individual medals in All-Around, Vault, Uneven Bars, Balance Beam and Floor Exercise, while Team and Team Portable Apparatus were also contested^[10].

Team Portable Apparatus appeared for the final time in 1956. World Gymnastics records that the modern four events, with Team and All-Around competition, have been in place since then^[5, 8].

NOT A SMALLER VERSION

The result was a distinct competitive tradition with its own depth, identity and possibilities.

FOUR COMPLETE PERFORMANCE WORLDS

The women's four

Vault



A rapid approach becomes spring, hand contact, flight, rotation and landing—often in only a few seconds.

Uneven Bars



Continuous swing, transitions, releases, regrasping, pirouettes and dismounts above and between two bars.

Balance Beam



Acrobatics, leaps, turns, balance, rhythm and composure on a surface ten centimetres wide.

Floor Exercise



Tumbling, dance, leaps, turns and choreography organised with music into one performance.

The women's programme cannot be reduced to grace or flexibility. It brings together explosive power, flight, strength, acrobatics, rhythm, precision, control and individual expression^[11].

Four apparatus provide no shortage of range. Each has developed a deep technical culture, its own champions and a continually expanding vocabulary of named skills.

LOOK AGAIN

Do not ask only, "Was it graceful?" Look for speed into Vault, shoulder action and flight on Bars, landing precision on Beam, and the relationship between tumbling, rhythm and choreography on Floor.

SHARED ROOTS · DIFFERENT ROUTINE LANGUAGES

Two shared stages



Floor Exercise

Both programmes use a 12 × 12 metre area and demanding acrobatics. Men combine tumbling with strength, balance and flexibility without music. Women combine tumbling with dance, leaps, turns and choreography to music.

SHARED



Vault

The central challenge is shared: run, hurdle, spring, contact the table, create flight and land. Codes, settings and competition requirements shape how vaulting is performed and judged.

Floor Exercise and Vault connect the men’s and women’s programmes. The apparatus names are shared; the current competitive requirements are not identical^[7, 11, 13, 17].

The common root on Floor is whole-body movement across the performance area. Each programme has developed its own compositional tradition.

On Vault, shared technique does not mean identical competition. The apparatus creates a common family of movement while the two Codes define distinct competitive languages.

ONE SPORT, VISIBLE IN BOTH

Families can see common movement principles expressed through two established traditions.

FAMILY VIEWING QUESTION

What remains the same—and what changes—when you watch the two programmes perform on a shared apparatus?

PRESERVED · RENEWED

Change without losing identity

Vault · 2001



The old horse gave way to a larger modern table, supporting safety and technical development^[4, 12].

Uneven Bars



Raised Parallel Bars became a continuous swing-and-flight apparatus through changes in distance, height and construction^[5, 9].

Balance Beam



An eight-centimetre beam at the 1934 Worlds later settled at today's ten centimetres as covering and construction evolved^[15].

Floor Exercise



A plain surface developed into a specialised sprung apparatus capable of supporting far more powerful tumbling^[5, 16].

Preserving tradition does not mean preserving every object, rule or technique exactly as it once was.

Codes of Points continue to change. New elements can enter the official vocabulary and may carry a gymnast's name after a successful first international performance at an eligible official FIG competition, formal submission and Technical Committee confirmation^[13, 17].

The silhouette of the sport remains familiar. The performance inside it continues to advance.

THE CENTRAL ACHIEVEMENT

The apparatus stayed recognisable because it was allowed to improve.

EDITORIAL POSITION

A sport can remember itself

IDENTITY



Recognisable apparatus give the sport a durable shape.

EXPERTISE



Gymnasts, coaches and judges deepen a technical culture over decades.

MEMORY



Families can recognise the apparatus across generations.

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine regards the preservation of the men's six and women's four as one of artistic gymnastics' great strengths.

A stable apparatus programme gives the sport a recognisable identity. A rings gymnast today belongs to a technical lineage visible at Athens 1896. A beam gymnast inherits an event shaped across generations of athletes who progressively expanded what could be imagined on ten centimetres.

Continuity also creates expertise. Coaches, judges, equipment makers and gymnasts can deepen an apparatus culture over decades. Specialists may devote a career to one event; all-around gymnasts learn to connect several different movement worlds.

It also creates shared memory. Parents and children can watch routines separated by many years and still recognise the apparatus—even when the skills, equipment and judging are very different.

WORLD REALITY

Recognisable does not mean directly comparable. A score belongs to its Code. A routine belongs to the equipment, expectations and knowledge of its era.

TWO TRADITIONS · EQUAL RESPECT

Six is not “more complete” than four. Four is not “less demanding” than six. Each programme should be understood through the distinct questions its apparatus ask.

CHELSEA EXPLAINS

I inherit the sport— and add my own chapter

“Gymnasts before me used these apparatus too. I learn the same movement language, and one day my generation may find new ways to perform it.”

CHELSEA · KENSINGTON GYMNASTICS MAGAZINE

When you learn to support, hang, balance, swing, jump, roll or land, you are meeting ideas that belong to a very long gymnastics story.

You do not have to perform an Olympic skill to be part of that tradition. Your first safe landing, controlled shape or confident swing matters because every advanced routine is built from foundations.

1 · What does it ask?

Speed, strength, swing, balance, rhythm—or several at once?

2 · Where is control?

Notice preparation, body shape and finish.

3 · What is distinctive?

What could only happen on this apparatus?

4 · What is preserved?

Would an earlier gymnast recognise the challenge?

A LONDON FAMILY LENS

A child's class is not a miniature Olympic programme. Yet safe landing, body tension, balance, support, swing, flight and control connect local learning to the wider movement language.



THE APPARATUS ENDURE · EVERY GENERATION ADDS NEW POSSIBILITIES

CLOSING PERSPECTIVE

Six and four · preserved and renewed

The men’s six and women’s four are not arbitrary numbers placed on a competition timetable. They are the mature forms of two histories that artistic gymnastics developed, tested and chose to preserve.

That preservation has not stopped progress. Apparatus, Codes and skills have continued to evolve. Gymnastics has remained recognisably itself while every generation has made performance more ambitious.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Men’s and women’s artistic gymnastics are two great apparatus traditions within one sport. Their difference gives artistic gymnastics breadth; their continuity gives it identity.

BEYOND THIS ISSUE

The World of Gymnastics will continue to connect the sport’s great international traditions with the events shaping gymnastics today—bringing in expert voices and first-hand perspectives when they can add something genuinely valuable.

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EDITORIAL EVIDENCE NOTE

This chapter separates official historical record from KGM interpretation. “Preserving the six and four is a strength” is the magazine’s editorial position. Early formats varied; the chapter does not claim the modern programmes existed unchanged in 1896.

Understanding the Sport

The Language of Gymnastics

What Does My Coach Mean?

Eight Everyday Phrases Children Hear in Gymnastics Class

A gymnastics coach may use only two or three words while a child is moving. To a parent in the viewing area, the phrase can sound incomplete. To the gymnast, it may connect with a demonstration, a station, a shape and several weeks of practice.

That is the special character of coaching language. A short cue is not the whole lesson. It is a compact reminder of the part that matters at that moment.

This chapter translates eight phrases heard in recreational classes across London and beyond. The aim is not to turn families into coaches. It is to help children and parents understand the conversation, ask better questions and recognise how much meaning can sit inside a very small phrase.

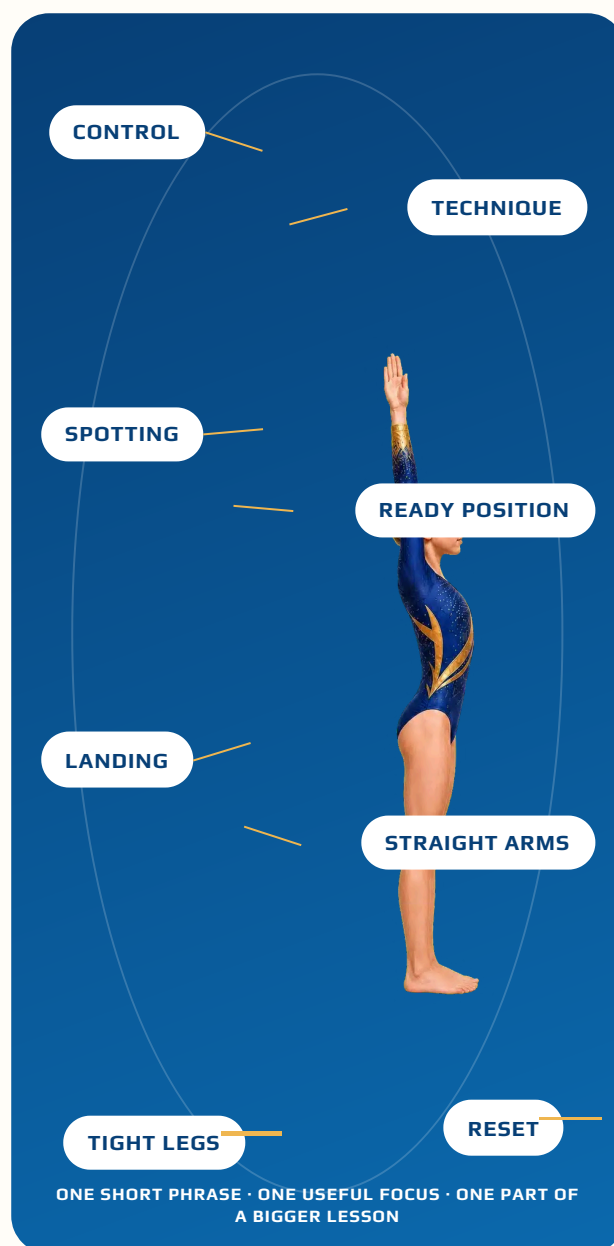
Building the series

Issue 1 · Why gymnastics has its own language

Issue 2 · Basic words children hear in class

Issue 3 · The body shapes beneath the skills

Issue 4 · What everyday coaching phrases mean



HOW A SHORT CUE WORKS

A cue is a prompt—not a complete instruction manual

Imagine a child preparing to cartwheel along a floor line. The coach has already explained the station, demonstrated the movement and watched an attempt. “Straight arms” may now be enough to direct attention towards one useful detail.

Move to a landing station and the same coach may say “control”. On balance beam, that word may guide an unhurried finish. During a travelling movement, it may mean staying organised while continuing to move.

The word has not changed. Its job has.

Research on children’s motor learning supports a careful view. Instructions and feedback can influence learning, but the useful focus depends on the learner, task and environment. Much of the evidence comes from typically developing children in middle childhood, and there is no strong basis for one universal cue formula across every child and situation^[1–3].



KGM EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

The research does not say that every instruction should sound the same. It tells us to be cautious with absolutes. A useful cue is specific enough to help, brief enough to remember and connected to the task the child is actually doing.

FAMILY TRANSLATION

When a phrase sounds too short, remember that you may be hearing only the final piece of a longer coaching conversation.

THE LANGUAGE CHANGES WITH THE TASK

Control and technique



Control

Simple meaning: Movement that remains purposeful and manageable for the task.

Control does not always mean perfectly still. A gymnast may show control while swinging, travelling, turning or making an appropriate adjustment. The useful question is not “Did the body move?” but “Did the gymnast remain organised enough for what came next?”

In a balance, control may include holding a position. In a jump, it may include taking off in the intended direction. In a sequence, it may mean connecting one part to another without rushing.

- a clearer beginning or finish;
- a speed the child can manage;
- balance before the next action;
- enough organisation to continue safely.



Technique

Simple meaning: The way a particular gymnastics task is organised and performed.

Technique includes timing, direction, body positions, contact with the apparatus and the order in which actions happen. It is not simply “looking beautiful”, and it is not one identical body shape imposed on every movement.

Good technique is specific. The arm action used for one jump may not suit another. A beginner’s appropriate version of a task may not look like an international gymnast’s finished skill. What matters is that the method suits the activity, the gymnast’s stage and the purpose of the exercise.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“Control means no movement, and technique means one perfect appearance.” **A clearer view:** Control can include movement. Technique has standards, but those standards belong to a particular task and stage of learning.

FAMILY TRANSLATION

“The coach is helping me organise how I do it—not asking me to become a statue or copy somebody else’s body.”

PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT · CLEAR FAMILY BOUNDARIES

What does spotting mean?

In gymnastics, **spotting** can describe purposeful coach positioning, readiness to assist or physical manual support used when appropriate within qualified coaching practice.

The purpose may be to help a gymnast experience part of a movement, understand a position, build confidence or manage the risk of an error. Spotting does not guarantee that nothing can go wrong, and it is not automatically required for every attempt.

British Gymnastics' current safeguarding education emphasises child-centred, safe and positive environments and the importance of gymnast voice^[4]. Its current coach-education pathway includes learning to provide and receive manual support as part of formal practical training^[5].

THE FAMILY BOUNDARY

British Gymnastics tells parents and supporters that their role is not to coach. Where a child needs additional physical support, it should be agreed with the club and provided under the direct supervision of a suitably qualified coach^[6].

A parent can ask what a child is learning, tell the coach about a worry and support the child emotionally. Technical manual support belongs to the coaching environment.



WHAT SPOTTING DOES NOT MEAN

- ✗ Evidence that the child has failed.
- ✗ Permission for an unqualified adult to copy hand placement.
- ✗ A technique learned from a magazine photograph.
- ✗ Physical contact in every attempt.
- ✗ A replacement for progression, equipment or professional judgement.

A HELPFUL CHILD QUESTION

“Can you tell me what you are helping me to feel or understand?”

A HELPFUL PARENT QUESTION

“Is there anything you would like us to encourage at home—and anything you would prefer us not to practise?”

SAFETY NOTE

This page explains the word. It does not teach spotting technique.

A CLEAR STARTING POINT SUPPORTS THE NEXT ATTEMPT

Ready position and reset

Ready position

Simple meaning: The agreed place and body arrangement from which a particular task begins.

There is no single ready position for all of gymnastics. A child preparing to run towards a vault station needs a different beginning from a child waiting beside a balance beam or holding a low bar.

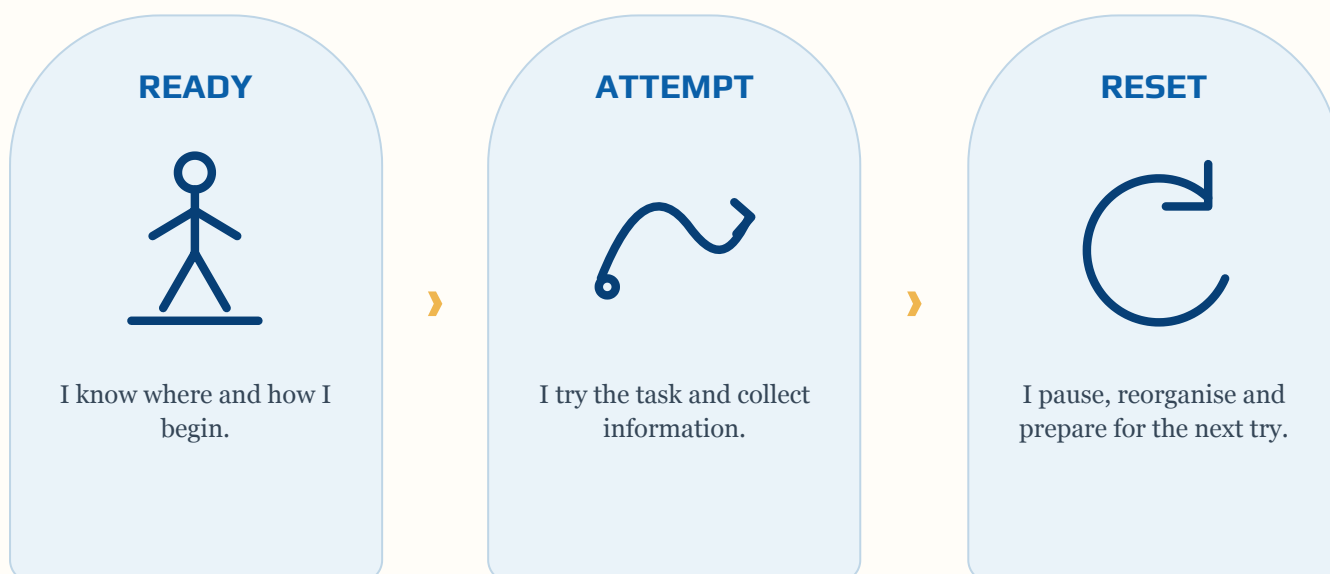
The phrase may organise where the feet, hands or body begin; the direction the gymnast faces; enough personal space; attention to the coach's signal; and the first action in a sequence. "Ready" is therefore both physical and practical.

Reset

Simple meaning: Pause, reorganise and return to the agreed starting point before another attempt.

A reset can be very small: step back to the marker, replace the hands, take a breath, check the direction and listen for the next cue.

It does not erase the previous attempt. The gymnast keeps the information and begins again with a cleaner starting point.



COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

"The coach said reset because my child was not listening or did everything wrong." **A clearer view:** Reset is often ordinary learning language. It can protect space, restore attention and give the next attempt a clear beginning.

FAMILY TRANSLATION

"I am not going back to zero. I am using what I just learned to begin again."

COMPLETE THE MOVEMENT

Landing

Simple meaning: The part of a jump, flight or dismount in which the gymnast returns to the surface and regains balance and control.

The landing begins before the feet touch down. The gymnast must recognise where the surface is, prepare for contact and organise the finish. The exact action depends on the height, direction, rotation, surface, apparatus and stage of learning.

That is why this chapter does not prescribe one landing shape for every situation.

WHAT MIGHT A COACH MEAN?

- ✓ Complete the skill all the way to the finish.
- ✓ Look for the surface and prepare for contact.
- ✓ Arrive in the intended area.
- ✓ Regain balance before moving away.
- ✓ Show that the attempt has ended.

WHAT IS A “STUCK LANDING”?

USA Gymnastics defines the familiar phrase **stuck landing** as slang for a landing performed without movement of the feet^[7]. In competition, foot movement and other landing faults can affect execution scoring, with the exact rules set by the relevant Code of Points^[8].

But a stuck landing is not the only useful landing in learning. A child may need an appropriate adjustment while developing a skill. The coach decides what the landing task is meant to teach at that stage.



Chelsea completes the movement by organising the landing—not by treating it as an afterthought.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

“A good landing must always be silent and completely still.” **A clearer view:** Quietness and stillness may be useful cues in some exercises, but the central purpose is an organised return to the surface appropriate to that task.

THE ELBOWS HAVE A PARTICULAR JOB

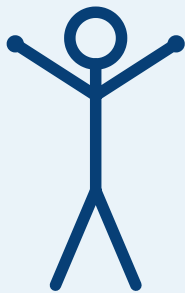
Straight arms

Simple meaning: Extend the elbows for the shape, support or line required in this particular task.

Straight arms can help a gymnast create a clear handstand line, maintain an appropriate support position or transfer force through the hands. The phrase may also make it easier for the coach to see whether the child is arriving in the intended position.

Yet “straight arms” is not a permanent rule for all gymnastics. Many actions use purposeful elbow bending. The cue only makes sense when connected to the skill being practised.

“Straight arms” may be followed by “as you push”, “when you reach support” or “during this shape”. Those extra words reveal the real job of the cue.



Task first. The same elbows may extend, bend, absorb, support or redirect at different moments. The cue identifies the position required now; it does not create a permanent rule for every movement.

SHAPE

The intended line from shoulder through elbow to hand.

SUPPORT

How the arms help carry or redirect the body.

TIMING

Whether the elbows change before, during or after the key action.

CONSISTENCY

Repeating the intended position so the movement becomes clearer.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

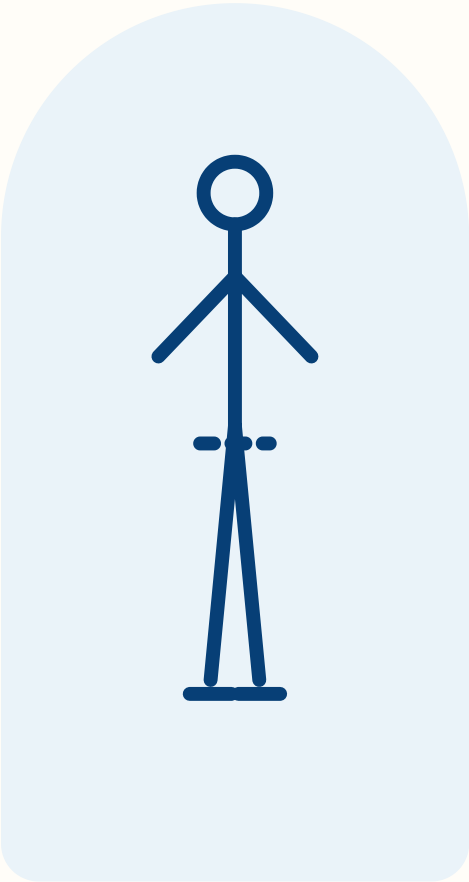
“Straight arms means force the elbows as far back as possible.” **A clearer view:** The goal is the position required for the activity—not forcing a joint for appearance. Bodies differ, and discomfort should be communicated to the coach.

FAMILY TRANSLATION

“The coach is directing my elbows for this part of the task.”

ONE REGION · ONE USEFUL FOCUS

Tight legs



SIMPLE MEANING

Organise the legs purposefully for the task, often by extending them, keeping them together or maintaining the intended line.

The phrase is common because the legs can separate, soften or lose their intended shape while a child is concentrating on the hands, direction or apparatus.

In a straight jump, “tight legs” may guide extension and a clear body line. In a handstand, it may help the two legs behave as one organised unit. In another skill, the legs may deliberately separate into a straddle or step—so keeping them together would be the wrong instruction.

NOT THE SAME AS “TIGHT BODY”

Issue 3 explained **tight body** as whole-body organisation beneath many gymnastics shapes. **Tight legs** is narrower. It directs attention to one region because that is the useful focus at this moment.

WHAT THE PHRASE DOES NOT MEAN

Squeeze at maximum effort for the whole session.	Ignore pain, cramp or discomfort.
Keep the legs together in every skill.	Make the body rigid when movement is required.
Treat a technical reminder as criticism of appearance.	Assume repetition means the child is not trying.

A CLEARER VIEW

A child may understand the phrase and still need time to coordinate it with the hands, direction, speed and timing of the skill. Knowing a word and applying it during movement are different achievements.

FAMILY TRANSLATION

“The coach is helping my legs keep the shape or connection needed for this task.”

THE PHRASE BELONGS TO THE EXERCISE

Gymnastics words behave differently in motion

A dictionary gives one definition. A coach chooses a working meaning for the task in front of the child.

PHRASE	IN ONE TASK IT MAY MEAN...	IN ANOTHER TASK IT MAY MEAN...
Control	Hold the finish long enough to show balance.	Keep the travelling movement organised without stopping it.
Technique	Change the order of the actions.	Repeat the same action with clearer timing or direction.
Ready position	Begin behind a floor marker facing forward.	Wait beside the apparatus until the coach invites the attempt.
Landing	Finish a low jump and regain balance.	Complete a dismount and show a clear end to the skill.
Straight arms	Maintain elbow extension in a support shape.	Reach with extended elbows during one part of a movement.
Tight legs	Keep the legs connected in a straight shape.	Maintain the intended leg line while the body turns or travels.
Reset	Return to the start marker.	Pause, reorganise the body and wait for a new cue.

Why the difference matters

If a family treats the phrase as one permanent command, the child can receive a conflicting message at home. “But you were told to keep your legs together” is unhelpful if today’s task deliberately uses a straddle.

The more reliable question is: **“What was that word helping you do in this exercise?”**

That question protects the coach’s context and gives the child space to explain what they understood.

LONDON FAMILY MOMENT

On the journey home from an after-school session, a child may remember only “control” or “reset”. Families who use more than one language may translate the ordinary word correctly and still miss its gymnastics meaning. Asking about the exercise—rather than testing the definition—usually reveals much more.

PAGE CLOSE

The phrase belongs to the task, not just to the dictionary.

CORRECTION IS PART OF LEARNING

What families often misunderstand

“The coach repeated the same phrase, so my child was not listening.”

Repetition can mean many things. The child may be coordinating several actions at once. A familiar cue can also become more meaningful as experience grows.

“One correction means the whole skill was wrong.”

A short cue often identifies the next workable detail precisely because other parts are already in place.

“I heard the phrase, so I can repeat it at home.”

The family may not have heard the demonstration, previous attempt or reason the cue was chosen. Repeating it away from the task can add pressure or create a competing coaching voice.

“Spotting means my child cannot do the skill.”

Spotting may introduce a feeling, manage an identified risk, guide part of a progression or support confidence. Ask what role it has in the plan.

“Reset means start all over again.”

The gymnast carries learning into the next attempt. Reset changes the starting point, not the history.

“The correction is a judgement of my child.”

A technical phrase belongs to the movement being practised. It does not define the child’s effort, confidence or value.

The supportive family role

LISTEN

Let the child describe the session in their own words.

ASK

Use curious questions: “What did that cue help you change?”

REASSURE

Correction is an ordinary part of learning.

REFER BACK

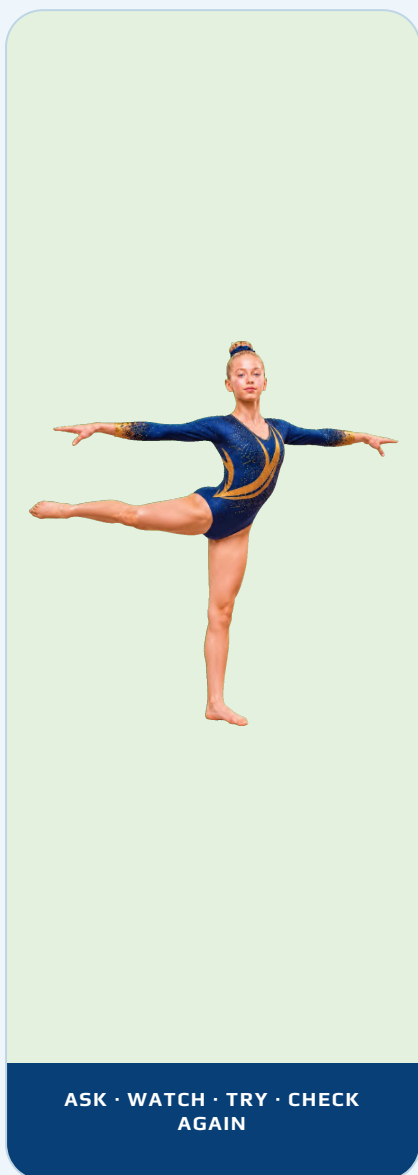
For safety, pain, confidence or practice, ask the coach.

FAMILY TAKEAWAY

Understanding the language should make the journey feel clearer—not turn the journey home into another training session.

CHELSEA EXPLAINS

It is all right to ask what a word means



ASK · WATCH · TRY · CHECK
AGAIN

“Sometimes I know the word but I am not sure what it means in this exercise. I can ask: ‘Can you show me which part you want me to think about?’”

1 · “Can you show me?”

A demonstration can make a short phrase visible.

2 · “Which part should I think about?”

This helps separate the present focus from everything else in the skill.

3 · “Can I try once, then check again?”

An attempt gives the coach and gymnast new information.

A note about confidence

Children do not need to pretend that every word is understood. Asking for clarification is not disobedience, and needing another demonstration is not failure. A healthy learning environment leaves room for the child's voice.

“Tell me what the word meant in today's exercise.”

“It is all right if it did not happen every time yet.”

“If you are unsure or worried, we can ask your coach together.”

THE FAMILY TEST

Before repeating a coaching phrase at home, ask: Do I know the exact task? Did the coach invite practice? Could my version conflict with the progression? Would encouragement be more useful? If the answer is uncertain, support the child and leave the technical cue in the gym.

KEEP THE TRANSLATION CONNECTED TO THE TASK

Gymnastics translation box

WHEN THE COACH SAYS...	A USEFUL FAMILY TRANSLATION IS...
Control	Keep the movement purposeful and manageable for this task.
Technique	Organise how this particular action is performed.
Spotting	The coach is positioned or assisting within qualified practice when appropriate.
Ready position	Begin from the agreed place and arrangement for this exercise.
Landing	Complete the return to the surface and regain balance and control.
Straight arms	Extend the elbows for this part of the task.
Tight legs	Organise the legs to keep the intended shape or connection.
Reset	Pause, return to the start and prepare for another attempt.

KEY TAKEAWAY

A coaching cue is a spotlight, not the whole stage. It draws attention to one useful part of a much larger lesson. The more clearly families understand the language of gymnastics, the more clearly they understand the sport itself.

BEYOND THIS ISSUE

Future chapters will move towards the language used to connect skills, describe progressions and understand how gymnastics grows from one action into another. The exact treatment will be confirmed against current editorial opportunities.

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Understanding the Sport

Questions We're Asked

Choosing a Gymnastics Programme

Six questions for families

A family may begin with a postcode, a timetable or a recommendation from a friend. In London, that is understandable. A place that can be reached after school, collected from on time and repeated every week has a practical advantage.

But convenience does not answer the whole question.

A gymnastics programme is also a learning environment, a safeguarding environment and part of a child's week. Families need to know who is responsible, how coaches are prepared and supported, whether teaching suits the child, how questions are handled and what the child experiences after the first excitement of joining.

Research on youth sport does not provide a universal league table for clubs. It does, however, identify qualities that matter to young people and the adults around them: enjoyment, opportunities to develop and see progress, social support and belonging, and open communication^[3].

THE ANSWER BENEATH THIS CHAPTER

The best programme is one that can offer **this child** a safe, welcoming, age-appropriate and sustainable experience. It is not automatically the closest, largest, most competitive or most heavily advertised option.

01 Does the child feel safe, welcomed and understood?

02 Are coaches appropriately qualified and supported?

03 Does teaching match age, experience and needs?

04 How are progress and concerns communicated?

05 Is the timetable and journey sustainable?

06 What should families notice during a trial and the early weeks?

CHAPTER PRINCIPLE

Do not search for one impressive sign. Look for several parts of the programme working together around the child.

01

QWA-04-01 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

Does my child feel safe, welcomed and understood?

SHORT ANSWER

The child's experience matters, but a warm welcome alone cannot prove that a setting is safe. Families should combine what the child says with clear adult checks about safeguarding, supervision, emergencies and how concerns are reported.

WHY

Children often notice the atmosphere before they understand the system. They notice whether somebody knows their name, explains where to go, listens when they are unsure and responds calmly when something does not work.

Those observations are valuable. They can tell a family about belonging, communication and whether the child feels able to speak.

Adults must also check arrangements that may not be visible from the viewing area. Department for Education guidance for parents and carers in England includes sports training and coaching among out-of-school settings. It advises families to ask about safeguarding, staff suitability, first aid, consent and emergency arrangements, codes of conduct, complaints and the person responsible for safeguarding^[1]. NSPCC Sport similarly recommends asking whether staff have been appropriately checked, whether a safeguarding policy exists, what happens after an accident, who families can speak to and what training is provided^[2].

WHAT VARIES

A child may be quiet during a first session because the room, people and routine are new. Another child may run in enthusiastically before the family has checked anything. One nervous arrival does not establish a poor programme, and one joyful arrival does not establish a safe one.

Look for how the adults respond: Is uncertainty noticed? Is the child shown what to do? Are reasonable questions welcomed? Is there a named route for a concern?

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Listen to the child - and check the system around them.

TWO DIFFERENT QUESTIONS

"Does my child feel comfortable here?"

This is essential information about the child's experience.

"Does the provider have appropriate safeguards?"

This is an adult responsibility that requires clear answers and accessible procedures.

Neither question replaces the other.

WHAT FAMILIES CAN ASK

- Who is the safeguarding lead or welfare contact?
- Where can I read the safeguarding and complaints procedures?
- What happens if my child is injured, distressed or needs help?
- How do you collect relevant medical, emergency and consent information?
- How can my child or I raise a concern?

SAFETY BOUNDARY

No policy, badge or conversation guarantees that nothing can go wrong. The purpose of these questions is to make responsibility visible. If there is an immediate danger, call 999. For a safeguarding concern, use the provider's published route and seek appropriate official advice.

02

QWA-04-02 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

Are the coaches appropriately qualified and supported?

SHORT ANSWER

Ask how coaches are prepared for the activities they lead, how their roles are supervised and what safeguarding, first-aid and continuing support surrounds them. An appropriate qualification is important; it is not a complete guarantee of programme quality.

SUPPORT AROUND THE COACH

Preparation

Appropriate learning for the class, activity and responsibility.

Supervision

Clear roles, mentoring and help when it is needed.

Safeguarding

Named responsibilities, procedures and routes for concern.

WHY

Gymnastics includes different disciplines, apparatus, ages and levels of complexity. A coach's preparation should therefore be appropriate to the activity and responsibility they hold.

Yet a certificate cannot describe every class. It does not show, by itself, how a coach communicates with a frightened child, manages a busy space, adapts a task, records an accident or seeks help when something lies outside their role.

Official parent guidance asks families to consider qualifications and training alongside safer recruitment, appropriate checks, safeguarding arrangements, first aid, insurance, codes of conduct and complaints procedures^[1,2]. These are layers, not substitutes for one another.

THE BETTER QUESTION

Instead of asking only, **"Is the coach qualified?"**, ask: **"Is this coach appropriately prepared and supported for this group, activity and responsibility?"**

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Check the coach - and the system that helps the coach work well.

- a clear coaching role and an appropriate level of responsibility;
- supervision or mentoring where it is needed;
- safeguarding learning and access to a named safeguarding lead;
- first-aid and emergency arrangements;
- a route for adapting participation or discussing individual needs;
- a culture in which a coach can ask for help rather than pretending to know everything.

WHAT FAMILIES CAN ASK

- What type of coaching preparation is required for this class?
- Who supports or supervises coaches in this programme?
- How are safeguarding and first-aid responsibilities organised?
- What happens when a child needs an adaptation or a different progression?
- Who should I contact about a coaching, welfare or communication concern?

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

"A qualified coach guarantees a good programme." **A clearer view:** appropriate qualification is an important safeguard and professional foundation. Programme quality also depends on daily practice, staffing, culture, communication, equipment, supervision and how the child is treated.

03

QWA-04-03 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

Does the teaching match my child’s age, experience and needs?

SHORT ANSWER

Look for teaching that gives the child an understandable task, an appropriate level of challenge and a way to progress without assuming that everyone in the same class must learn in the same way or at the same speed.

WHY

A class title tells families very little about the lesson itself. “Beginner”, “recreational”, “development”, “advanced” and age-band labels may organise a timetable, but children inside the group still arrive with different experience, confidence, attention, movement histories and support needs.

Sport England’s child-first approach likewise places safety, enjoyment and the needs of children and young people at the centre of a positive experience^[5].

Good teaching does not require every child to perform a different activity. The same station can contain different goals: one child may be learning where to place the hands; another may be joining two familiar actions; another may be improving rhythm, control or independence.

In a qualitative study involving youth athletes and sport stakeholders, opportunities for skill development and visible progress appeared alongside enjoyment, belonging and communication as part of a quality youth-sport experience^[3]. The study was conducted across several sports in Canada, with youth participants aged 10–18. It does not validate a gymnastics-class checklist, but it offers a useful reminder: progression is only one part of quality, and progress should be meaningful to the learner.

WHAT TO NOTICE

CLARITY Instructions are short enough to understand and supported by demonstration where useful.	PURPOSE The task has a clear beginning, boundary and purpose.
ENGAGEMENT Children spend more time meaningfully engaged than waiting without direction.	RESPONSIVENESS Coaches notice when a task is too easy, too difficult, confusing or uncomfortable.
PROGRESS Development includes shapes, control, confidence, consistency, understanding and safe independence - not only harder skills.	RESPECT Adaptations are handled without humiliating or isolating the child.

WHAT VARIES

The most suitable group may not be the group with the most advanced name. Moving to a harder class is not automatically progress; remaining in a well-matched class is not automatically stagnation.

Children with disabilities, health conditions, recent injury, pain or additional support needs may require a more specific conversation. A magazine cannot decide that placement. The programme should explain what information it needs and how decisions are reviewed.

A USEFUL FAMILY QUESTION

“What is my child learning now, and what would meaningful progress look like over the next stage?”

Parent takeaway: Choose a place where the child can understand, participate and develop - not simply occupy a named level.

04

QWA-04-04 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

How are progress and concerns communicated?

SHORT ANSWER

Families do not need a report after every session, but they do need to know how ordinary information, progress questions, medical updates, complaints and safeguarding concerns should travel through the programme.

WHY

Communication begins before the first skill. Families need accurate information about timetable, fees, clothing, arrival and collection, cancellations, observation, consent, relevant health information and who to contact.

They also need a realistic way to understand the learning. A child may describe one correction as the whole lesson. A parent watching through glass may see an isolated moment without hearing the explanation. A coach may be responsible for several children and unable to hold a detailed conversation while supervising them.

Research across four competitive youth-sport settings found that early and ongoing parent engagement mattered to the wider experience. The study highlighted onboarding, check-ins and clear communication, while also showing that inconsistent communication could create frustration and disengagement^[4]. This does not mean every club needs constant messaging. It supports something more practical: families should know how communication works.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Good communication is not constant communication. It is knowing where the right conversation belongs.

FOUR DIFFERENT ROUTES

Everyday information

Timetable, fees, clothing, events, cancellations and practical updates.

Progress conversation

What the child is learning, what has improved and what may come next.

Individual information

Medical updates, disability or support needs, confidence changes and relevant family information.

Concern or complaint

A named route that does not depend on catching the coach beside the apparatus.

WHAT GOOD COMMUNICATION DOES NOT MEAN

- a technical report after every class;
- discussing another child's progress;
- expecting a coach to stop supervising a group for a long conversation;
- using a public messaging group for private medical or safeguarding information;
- promising a date for every skill.

LONDON HANDOVER MOMENT

At the end of an evening class, one adult may be collecting while another is on a train, a sibling is waiting and the next group is entering. A clear contact route is often safer and more useful than trying to solve an important question in the doorway.

WHAT FAMILIES CAN ASK

"If I have a progress question, practical concern or safeguarding concern, who should I contact - and how?"

05

QWA-04-05 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

Is the timetable and journey sustainable?

SHORT ANSWER

Convenience should not be the only criterion, but it is a real one. A programme must fit the child’s whole week closely enough that attendance, food, school, sleep, family relationships and recovery remain workable.

WHY

London families do not attend a timetable on paper. They travel through a city.

A 60-minute class can require a school collection, two trains, a walk, a sibling arrangement, food carried in a bag and a late journey home. Another family may find that a slightly longer class closer to school is far easier to sustain. A weekend programme may protect weekday sleep but compete with family time. There is no universal answer.

This is why **the closest programme is not automatically the best programme - and the programme with the longest journey is not automatically the most valuable.**

The question is whether the arrangement can be repeated without asking the child and family to absorb a cost that overwhelms the benefit.

ACROSS THIS ISSUE

The Recovery in Gymnastics chapter treats the week as one connected system. Use that lens here: programme choice is not only about what happens in the gym, but also about what the session asks from the hours around it.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Choose the programme and the week together.

DRAW THE REAL WEEK

SCHOOL Finishing time and homework.	JOURNEY Door-to-door travel and likely delays.	FOOD Before and after the session.
FAMILY Siblings, carers and working hours.	RECOVERY Sleep, rest and unstructured time.	COST Fees, travel, clothing and events.

WHAT VARIES

Some families value a specialist programme enough to accept a longer journey. Others need a local, stable arrangement. A child may cope well with one late evening and poorly with three. A timetable may work during one school term and need review during another.

Sustainability is not a lack of ambition. A programme that the family can attend calmly and consistently may offer a better experience than an impressive option that produces repeated rushing, missed meals, late nights or constant conflict.

THE FAMILY REALITY CHECK

Place the advertised timetable beside the actual school-and-family day. A sustainable plan works not only on a good week, but through the ordinary weeks that make up a term.

06

QWA-04-06 · CHOOSING A PROGRAMME

What should I notice during a trial and the early weeks?

SHORT ANSWER

Treat a trial as a sample, not a final verdict. Notice how the programme prepares the family, organises the session, responds to the child and follows up over time. Look for patterns - but never postpone action on a serious safety or safeguarding concern.

BEFORE THE CHILD MOVES

- Where to arrive and who receives the child.
- What to wear and bring.
- Consent, emergency and health information.
- Whether and how families may observe.
- What the trial is intended to assess.
- Who answers practical, coaching and safeguarding questions.

DURING THE SESSION

- Clear tasks and enough safe space.
- Purposeful names, explanations and demonstrations.
- Organised waiting.
- Coaches noticing confusion, pain or distress.

AFTER THE SESSION

- Did you know what to do?
- Was there somebody you could ask?
- Did anything worry, hurt or confuse you?
- What did you enjoy?
- Would you like to return?

LOOK BEYOND THE HARDEST SKILL

Notice whether children can ask a question, whether corrections are directed towards the task rather than used to shame the child, and whether the session appears appropriate for the group's stage.

Ask about the experience rather than conducting an examination. The answer may change as the child becomes familiar with the people and routine. A cautious first week can grow into belonging. Initial excitement can also fade once the ordinary pattern becomes clear.

THE FIRST-MONTH QUESTION

“Now that the programme is becoming ordinary, does my child generally understand what is happening, feel able to speak, and have a workable place in the group?”

DO NOT WAIT FOR A PATTERN WHEN

There is immediate danger, a disclosure of harm, pressure to keep ordinary coaching interactions secret, humiliation, ignored pain or distress, an unsafe environment, or no workable route for raising a safeguarding concern. Use the appropriate safeguarding or emergency route.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

One session shows a moment. The early weeks begin to show the environment.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

A trial cannot certify a programme. It gives families one structured opportunity to observe, listen and decide what needs a further question.

A PRACTICAL FAMILY DECISION PAGE

A three-stage check for families

This is not a scorecard and it cannot certify a programme. It is a way to organise observations and decide what needs a conversation.

1 · Before the trial

THE PRACTICAL PICTURE

- Is the programme's purpose and age range clear?
- Can we repeat the timetable and journey?
- Do we understand fees and likely additional costs?

THE RESPONSIBILITY PICTURE

- Who leads the programme?
- What coaching preparation is required?
- Who is the safeguarding contact?
- Where are the safeguarding, complaints and emergency arrangements?
- What information does the programme need about the child?

2 · During the session

THE CHILD'S EXPERIENCE

- Is the child welcomed and shown what to do?
- Can the child ask a question or say when something is wrong?
- Does the challenge appear understandable and appropriate?

THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Is space and waiting organised?
- Are instructions, demonstrations and corrections purposeful?
- Do coaches notice individuals within the group?
- Are adaptations handled respectfully?

3 · After the first month

REVIEW THE PATTERN

- Does the child usually want to attend - or can they explain what makes attendance difficult?
- Do they generally feel that they belong?
- Can they describe something they are learning?
- Does the week remain workable?
- Do we know how to ask a question or raise a concern?
- Has the programme communicated what comes next?

The question beneath the checklist

Do responsibility, teaching, communication, child experience and family reality fit together?

A programme can be impressive in one area and still leave an important question unanswered. Use the guide to identify the conversation that should happen next.

The decision principle: Do not ask whether the programme looks impressive. Ask whether responsibility, teaching, communication, child experience and family reality fit together.

CONTINUE AND REVIEW

The arrangement is broadly suitable. Keep listening and review when circumstances change.

ASK A SPECIFIC QUESTION

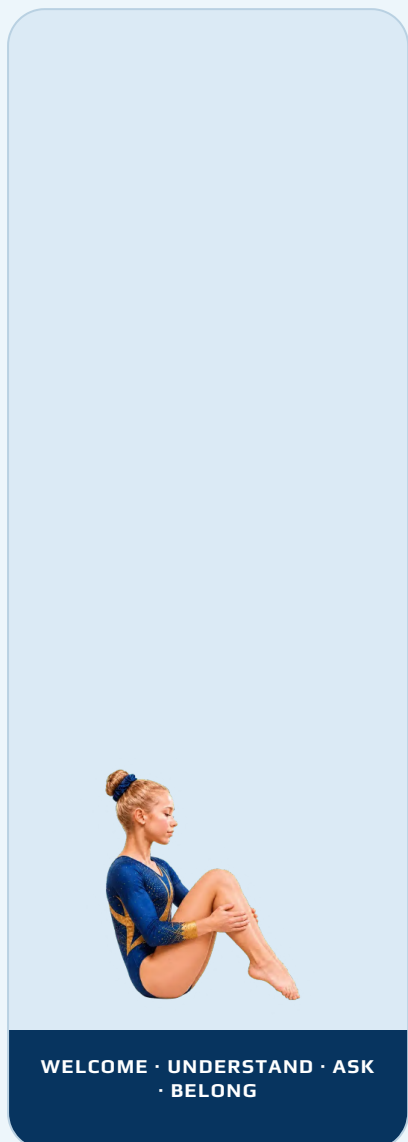
Something is unclear or inconsistent. Use the correct contact route before assuming.

ACT ON A CONCERN

Safety, safeguarding, pain, distress or conduct requires prompt action through the appropriate route.

CHELSEA EXPLAINS

Chelsea notices more than the hardest skill



"A good class is not only the place where I learn the hardest skill. I should know who is helping me, what I am doing and that I can ask when I am unsure."

WHAT CHELSEA CAN NOTICE

- Somebody welcomes her and explains where to begin.
- She understands at least one useful focus for the activity.
- The task feels challenging without making her feel abandoned.
- A coach listens if something hurts, worries or confuses her.
- Corrections help the movement; they do not make her feel small.
- She can enjoy another child's progress without being measured against them.
- She knows who to ask when she needs help.

WHAT CHELSEA DOES NOT HAVE TO DECIDE

Chelsea is not responsible for checking qualifications, policies, staff recruitment, insurance or emergency procedures. Those are adult responsibilities.

Her responsibility is simpler: tell a trusted adult when she is unsure, worried, hurt or unhappy - and share what helps her feel confident and included.

"Can you show me where I begin?"

A clear starting point can make a new room feel manageable.

"What should I think about on this turn?"

One useful focus is easier to use than trying to fix everything at once.

"Who can I speak to if I am worried?"

Children should not have to keep a concern to themselves.

"You do not have to know everything on your first day."

"You can enjoy the class and still tell me when something does not feel right."

"We can ask a question together."

A STRONG GYMNAST KNOWS

"Speaking up does not make me difficult. It helps the adults understand what I need."

CLOSING ANSWER

Choose the experience - not the advertisement

A programme does not become right for a child because it is nearby, popular, highly competitive or connected to an impressive name. Those details may matter, but none can answer the family’s whole question.

Look for responsibility that can be explained, teaching that meets the child, communication with a clear route, a child who is listened to, and a timetable the family can genuinely sustain.

The decision may also change. Children grow. School weeks become heavier. Confidence changes. A programme develops. Families move. Choosing well is not one permanent judgement; it is a careful beginning followed by honest review.

In one sentence

Choose a safe, welcoming, age-appropriate and sustainable programme for this child - and keep listening after the first decision.

ACROSS THIS ISSUE

Recovery in Gymnastics

Place the class inside the whole week.

The Language of Gymnastics

Understand coaching words without becoming a second coach.

Gymnastics for Life

Ask whether today’s choices can support durable participation and movement.

BEYOND THIS ISSUE

Future Questions We’re Asked chapters will continue to follow real family decisions as children progress, compete, balance school and training, meet fear, pause, return and define success. The exact next question will be confirmed against the strongest editorial opportunity at the time.

EDITORIAL DISCLOSURE

Dr Stefan Kolimechikov is the founder and director of Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy and editor of Kensington Gymnastics Magazine. This chapter does not rank providers or present KCGA as the automatic choice. The criteria apply equally to every programme, including KCGA.

EDITORIAL SAFETY BOUNDARY

This chapter provides general educational information. It does not certify or investigate a provider, guarantee safety, replace official safeguarding procedures, provide legal advice or assess an individual child’s needs. No single policy, check, qualification or affiliation proves the whole experience.

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Understanding the Sport

Gymnastics Myths

Safety Without Panic

Five familiar beliefs about risk, falls and growing bodies—examined honestly

“Is gymnastics safe?” sounds like a simple question. It is not.

Safety is sometimes discussed as though an activity must belong in one of two boxes: safe or dangerous. Children’s movement does not work like that. Running, climbing, cycling, playground activity and gymnastics all contain the possibility of a fall, a mistake or an injury. The important questions concern what the child is being asked to do, how the task is introduced, what support is present and whether the demands suit that child at that moment.

Gymnastics has real injury risks. Research in competitive gymnastics and paediatric emergency departments makes that clear^[1,2]. But those findings do not mean that every gymnast faces the same risk, or that evidence from high-level training can be transferred directly to a young child attending a recreational class.

RISK DESERVES CONTEXT, NOT A LABEL

1 “Gymnastics is too dangerous.”
RISK ≠ INEVITABLE HARM

2 “Children will hurt themselves if they fall.”
FALL ≠ AUTOMATIC INJURY

3 “Soft play is safer than gymnastics.”
SOFT ≠ RISK-FREE

4 “Gymnastics damages children’s bodies.”
LOAD ≠ AUTOMATIC DAMAGE

5 “Gymnastics is bad for growing children.”
GROWTH ≠ REASON TO STOP

THIS CHAPTER’S PROMISE

This chapter does not promise that injuries never happen. It replaces both panic and false reassurance with something more useful: context.

1

MYTH 1 · SAFETY AND INJURIES

“Gymnastics is too dangerous.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Elite gymnastics is dramatic. The apparatus is high, the skills are difficult and televised falls are memorable. A short video of an injury can become someone’s entire picture of the sport.

The word *gymnastics* also covers very different experiences. A child learning a low balance, an adolescent training a difficult dismount and an international gymnast preparing for competition are all participating in gymnastics—but they are not receiving the same exposure.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Injuries do occur in gymnastics. A systematic review of competitive artistic gymnastics found substantial variation between studies and identified higher competitive level and exposure to competition as risk factors^[1]. A separate study of gymnastics injuries treated in United States emergency departments confirmed that children and adolescents present with fractures, sprains, concussions and other injuries^[2].

Those studies matter, but they answer particular questions about particular populations. They do not provide a clean injury probability for a child attending one or two recreational classes in London. Injury definitions, training levels, ages and exposure measurements differ, and some research is based only on injuries serious enough to reach an emergency department.

“Too dangerous” therefore hides the information families actually need. A responsible gymnastics environment cannot promise zero risk. It can manage risk through appropriate tasks, equipment, progression, recovery, communication and professional judgement.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Do not look for a promise that nothing can ever happen. Look for evidence that difficulty is introduced carefully and that concerns are taken seriously.

2

MYTH 2 · FALLS AND LEARNING

“Children will hurt themselves if they fall.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Adults naturally want to protect children. When a child loses balance or lands unexpectedly, the movement can look frightening—especially when the adult cannot judge the height, speed or skill involved.

In everyday language, *a fall* and *an injury* can begin to sound like the same thing.

THE USEFUL DISTINCTION

EVENT AND OUTCOME

A fall describes what happened. An injury describes one possible result. Responsible decisions depend on the details between those two words.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

A fall is an event. An injury is one possible outcome. What happens depends on several interacting details: the height, speed, direction, surface, equipment, body position, task and the child’s readiness.

Evidence from playground research helps illustrate why context matters. A systematic review identified fall height, surfacing and equipment features among the factors associated with playground injury^[4]. That research is not a measure of gymnastics safety, but it shows why the word *fall* alone cannot describe the level of risk.

In gymnastics, balance can be lost while a child is learning. The answer is not to pretend that every fall is harmless. It is to reduce unnecessary exposure: use suitable heights and equipment, teach manageable steps, and change the task when control is not yet sufficient. These are principles of responsible coaching, not a guarantee against injury.

If pain or injury follows a fall, it must be reported and respected. British Gymnastics guidance states that gymnasts should not hide pain, injury or illness and that clubs and coaches should take reports seriously^[3].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

A fall does not automatically mean injury, but it should never be dismissed. Ask what happened, how the child feels and what will change before the next attempt.

3

MYTH 3 · ENVIRONMENT AND EXPOSURE

“Soft play is safer than gymnastics.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Soft play looks forgiving. The surfaces are padded, the colours are friendly and the word *play* feels less demanding than the word *gymnastics*.

A gymnastics hall, by contrast, contains technical apparatus and structured tasks. That can make it appear more dangerous before anyone has examined what children are actually doing in either environment.

EVIDENCE BOUNDARY

The evidence reviewed for this chapter does not provide a fair, matched injury comparison between a soft-play visit and a coached recreational gymnastics class.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Impact-absorbing surfaces matter. Playground research indicates that non-impact-absorbing surfaces and greater fall heights are associated with higher injury risk. It also shows that injury can still occur on impact-absorbing surfaces, particularly when height increases^[4].

Softness is therefore one part of safety, not a complete safety system.

The activities, heights, equipment, ages, supervision, injury definitions and time spent participating are not equivalent. It would be misleading to declare either environment universally safer.

A soft-play setting can include climbing, speed, collisions and falls. A gymnastics class can include instruction, waiting turns, low-level tasks, planned progressions and specialist equipment. Either description may change from one venue or session to another.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Do not judge safety by softness alone. Consider the complete experience: the activity, height, equipment, organisation, supervision and whether the challenge suits the child.

4

MYTH 4 · LOAD AND THE BODY

“Gymnastics damages children’s bodies.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Gymnastics asks children to support weight through their hands, land from jumps, hang, rotate and repeat movements. Families may hear about wrist, back, knee, ankle or shoulder problems and conclude that the sport must be damaging the body.

TWO TRUTHS CAN COEXIST

Movement can support physical development. Training can also produce injury when demand and capacity no longer match. Neither truth erases the other.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Physical load is not automatically damage. Bodies respond to movement and loading, but the response depends on the amount, intensity, recovery, development and individual capacity involved.

The evidence contains both benefits and risks. Competitive-gymnastics research documents important injury patterns^[1]. At the same time, a systematic review found higher bone mineral values in groups of artistic and rhythmic gymnasts than in untrained comparison groups^[5]. These findings do not cancel each other. They show why a single word such as *damage* is too blunt.

An injury is also not automatically permanent harm. Injuries differ in type and severity, and they require appropriate assessment and management. Pain can have several possible sources; it should be treated as information that deserves attention, not as proof that a child is weak and not as something to hide.

British Gymnastics advises that a gymnast’s report of pain, injury or illness must be respected and that medical advice should be recommended where there is doubt^[3].

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Healthy training asks the body to adapt without ignoring its signals. Report pain early, adapt activity when needed and seek appropriately qualified advice when there is concern.

5

MYTH 5 · GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

“Gymnastics is bad for growing children.”

A FAMILIAR BELIEF EXAMINED CALMLY

WHY PEOPLE BELIEVE IT

Many elite gymnasts are shorter than average, and some mature later than their peers^[6]. Children also change quickly during growth spurts, when movements that once felt easy may temporarily feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable.

These observations can be turned into a simple story: gymnastics must stop growth or harm growing bodies.

SELECTION IS NOT CAUSATION

The physical characteristics seen among elite gymnasts do not, by themselves, prove that gymnastics training created those characteristics.

WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE

Short stature among elite gymnasts cannot be interpreted as proof that training caused it. Gymnastics selects for particular physical characteristics, and children who remain at high level are not a random sample of all children.

A review convened by the FIG Scientific Commission concluded that the available evidence did not show that intensive artistic gymnastics training compromised attained adult height or reduced the growth of body segments. The authors also emphasised limitations in the evidence and insufficient information for some endocrine questions^[6].

That conclusion is not permission to ignore growth-related concerns. A 2026 systematic review and meta-analysis reported substantial wrist pain and injury in adolescent artistic gymnasts, while rating the certainty of the included evidence as low to very low^[7]. British Gymnastics guidance also encourages discussion of pain during growth spurts^[3].

Growing children need training that can change with them. A sudden change in pain, coordination, tolerance or confidence may mean that the task or amount of training needs to be reconsidered.

PARENT TAKEAWAY

Growth is not a reason to fear gymnastics. It is a reason to watch, listen and adapt rather than expecting a changing body to perform exactly as it did before.

FAMILY LENS

From Reassurance to Responsibility

What does responsible risk management look like?

No coach, club or activity can remove every possibility of injury. Responsible practice is visible in the decisions made before, during and after a difficult moment.

01

Listen
The child can report pain, fear or uncertainty without being mocked, ignored or treated as a problem. Parents and coaches share relevant information.

02

Match
The task, height, equipment and level of support match the gymnast’s current readiness—not merely their age, group or ambition.

03

Progress
Difficulty is built through understandable steps. A child is not rushed into a larger movement simply because another child can perform it.

04

Observe
Adults notice changes in control, pain, fatigue, confidence and tolerance, especially during growth or after time away.

05

Refer
When there is doubt about pain, injury or illness, activity is adapted and qualified healthcare advice is sought^[3].

Three useful questions after a fall or painful moment

What happened?
Ask for the child’s account without suggesting the answer.

What changed afterwards?
Notice pain, swelling, movement, confidence and ordinary daily function.

What is the next responsible step?
That may be rest, an adapted task, communication with the coach or appropriate medical assessment. It is not automatically “try again”.

THE CENTRAL IDEA

Risk becomes easier to understand when families move from broad labels to specific observations and responsible decisions.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Honest safety is stronger than a promise

Gymnastics should not be described as harmless. It should not be described as inevitably harmful either.

Children deserve movement, challenge and the satisfaction of learning difficult things. They also deserve adults who recognise that confidence does not replace preparation, softness does not remove every hazard and ambition does not make pain irrelevant.

The most useful family position is neither fear nor blind trust. It is informed attention: understanding the task, listening to the child, noticing change and expecting responsible decisions when something does not feel right.

Safety is not the absence of every fall. It is the presence of good judgement before, during and after one.

EDITORIAL AND MEDICAL BOUNDARY

This chapter provides general educational information. It does not diagnose an injury or determine whether an individual child is ready to train. Pain, injury or illness should be reported to the coach and parent or carer. Where there is doubt, persistent pain, moderate or severe pain, altered daily function or concern after an injury, advice should be sought from an appropriately qualified healthcare professional.

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READING THE EVIDENCE

Competitive, emergency-department, playground and governing-body sources answer different questions. This chapter keeps those populations and evidence types separate.

CLOSING REFLECTION

Everything Around the Skill Matters



A routine may last less than a minute. What helps a gymnast reach it extends across the whole week—and often across years.

At the beginning of this issue, we followed gymnastics from Kensington to the scientific stage in Salt Lake City. We saw how a stronger scientific voice can improve care, sharpen questions and give recreational gymnastics greater visibility. Evidence becomes useful only when its limits travel with it.

That principle continued through the hip and pelvis, dietary fat and recovery. No body region, nutrient or difficult lesson explains a child by itself. The fuller picture is more useful than the simplest label.

The picture reaches beyond childhood and the gym. The Adult Gymnastics British Championships showed ambition across generations, while a proposed Masters pathway asked how lifelong participation should be recognised. A London journey may hold school, travel, food, waiting, work and the return home; a competition depends on judges, volunteers and organisers as well as gymnasts.

Gymnastics carries history forward. The men’s six and women’s four apparatus programmes preserve two traditions while equipment, Codes and skills evolve. Coaching words—*control, technique, landing, reset*—belong to this living practice. Their meaning comes from the task, the relationship and the moment of learning.

WE MAY BEGIN TO ASK

01

What has the whole week asked of this child?

02

Does this environment help the child feel safe and able to learn?

03

What does the coach’s phrase mean in this task?

04

Is ambition matched with preparation, progression and recovery?

05

Can this journey remain positive and sustainable?

Choosing a programme and thinking about safety bring these ideas together. Qualifications, reputation, scores and promises matter, but none describes the complete experience. Safety is not the absence of all risk; it is the continuing work of listening, matching, progressing, observing and seeking the right help.

No single perspective sees everything. Science offers boundaries and better questions; coaches see movement develop; judges see detail; families know the week around the lesson. The gymnast experiences all these worlds at once. Looking beyond the isolated skill helps us pursue achievement while protecting recovery, health and joy.

The skill is one moment.

The support around it helps gymnastics remain meaningful and sustainable.

ISSUE 4 · END MATTER

Sources & Further Reading

A consolidated alphabetical record of the sources used throughout this issue. Chapter-local numbering has been removed; DOI and official-source links remain active in the digital edition.

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THE PERSON BEHIND THE PUBLICATION

About the Editor

Stefan Kolimechkov PhD

Editor, *Kensington Gymnastics Magazine*
Founder & Director, Kensington & Chelsea
Gymnastics Academy, London



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COACH • SCIENTIST • GYMNAST

Stefan Kolimechkov is a London-based sports scientist, gymnastics coach and active Masters gymnast. His coaching journey began in Bulgaria, initially through assistant coaching, and now brings together around two decades of practical experience with scientific research and continued participation in the sport.

He founded Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy to offer children carefully structured progression, thoughtful teaching and a positive relationship with movement. His work connects the gym, the laboratory and the realities of family life in London.

FROM RESEARCH TO THE GYM

That combination shapes this magazine: evidence is checked carefully, technical ideas are translated clearly for families, and gymnastics is considered across childhood and throughout life.

“Knowledge matters most when it helps people understand what they see and experience.”

ISSUE 4 • IN COMPETITION

At the 2026 Adult Gymnastics British Championships, Stefan represented KCGA, won silver in the MAG Pro Over-30 all-around and ranked first on still rings for a fourth consecutive championship.

SELECTED CREDENTIALS



Doctor of Philosophy

Research on children's physical development and nutrition in gymnastics.



More than 20 years' coaching

Working with children, adults and families across Bulgaria and the UK.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Kensington & Chelsea Gymnastics Academy operates within recognised professional and safeguarding frameworks. Separately, Stefan holds Chartered membership of CIMSPA, is a Fellow of the European College of Sport Science, and is a member of the American College of Sports Medicine.

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Support Independent Gymnastics Education

Kensington Gymnastics Magazine makes carefully researched gymnastics knowledge freely accessible to families, coaches, teachers, students and everyone interested in movement across the lifespan.

Every issue is independently researched, written and designed to explain gymnastics through evidence, professional experience and thoughtful communication.

As the magazine grows, we welcome carefully selected sponsorship and partnership conversations with organisations that share our commitment to education, children’s wellbeing, healthy development and safe, evidence-informed physical activity.

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To help people understand gymnastics more clearly.

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