

Pre-season Gymnastics Conditioning

If you're participating in the gymnastics team during our winter season, strength training plays an important role in your workout. It'll help you learn new skills while decreasing the potential for injury. The following sections provide general exercises that develop the muscles necessary for gymnastics success.

Abs

Core strength is crucial on every gymnastics apparatus. It's especially critical on uneven bars, where the legs need to be held up for much of the exercise. Below are two exercises that you can easily practice outside of the gym:

HOLLOW BODY HOLD

The higher you advance, the more we will emphasize the hollow position: Back rounded and pelvis tucked under, with the arms extended next to the ears and the toes slightly in front of the body. The hollow body hold helps with strengthening your core, which you'll need especially for the bar events and floor tumbling.

The following instructions break down the proper form, technique, and procedure:

Sit on the floor in a ball, knees tucked to your chest.

Lift your arms so that they cover your ears.

At the same time, extend your legs until your feet are five to six inches off of the ground.

Lean back slowly, pressing the small of your back into the floor.

Your lower back should be against the floor at all times, with your shoulders above the ground.

V-UPS

To begin this exercise, lie flat on the floor with your arms and legs extended, and then proceed as follows:

Simultaneously lift your arms and legs, touching your toes over the midsection of your body to form a "v."

At the height of the v-up, you should be balanced on your lower back.

Extend back to the floor, and repeat.

Test yourself: Try to complete as many as can you in 30 seconds. As your core strength improves, you should be able to increase the number.

V-ups are also useful for training the hip flexors to snap your legs up quickly, which you'll need for pike jumps, back flips, and all of the bar apparatuses. Make sure you maintain correct leg form and keep your legs straight through the v-up.

Back

ARCH-UPS

Arch-ups are the exact opposite of hollow body. Lie on your stomach with your arms above your head and your legs straight. Lift your arms and legs so that your stomach is the only part of your body still on the floor. Lower to the ground and repeat.

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VARIATIONS FOR ARCH-UPS:

Use a partner and an elevated surface: Keep your legs and hips on the surface (such as a mat or vault table) and drape your torso over the edge so that you're folded in half. With a partner holding your legs, perform the arch-up.

Alternate arms and legs: Lie on your stomach. Lift one leg and one arm at the same time (i.e. left arm and right leg), then lower to the ground and repeat with the other arm and leg.

Isolate the legs: Hold onto a mat or other stable surface. Lift just your legs, making sure to keep the feet together.

Not only do arch-ups help strengthen your lower back, they're also a way to practice heel drive, which you'll need for vault and your front handsprings on floor.

PUSH-UPS

Hot Tip: Straighten Out

When fatigued, it's easy for the hips to sag in the push-up, producing a large arch. Or, in the other extreme, you push the hips into the air so that the push-up now looks like a V instead of a straight line. Your push-up may feel easier in these positions, but your gymnastics won't benefit.

Push-ups are the simplest way to work your triceps, shoulders, and pectorals. A good push-up requires a straight or hollow core, with the back flat and shoulders over your hands — the precise position that you'll need for great casts on bars and swings on pommel horse.

Once you're in this position, lower your body as one unit to the floor. Touch your chin to the ground, and then push back up.

If you feel like a push-up pro, try these variations:

Diamond (index fingers and thumbs touching)

Wide arm (hands placed beyond your shoulders)

Handstand push-ups

Wall Handstands

If you're not yet comfortable in the handstand position, practicing against a wall is a great way to achieve the necessary balance and body position. If you already have a strong handstand, the challenge will be to hold the handstand for as long as possible without breaking form.

Face to the wall: With your stomach on the wall, you should be able to press your hips and shoulders against the wall. Push down on the floor through the shoulders to prevent any sagging or arching.

Back to the wall: Your lower back and shoulders should touch the wall. Once again, there should be no arch.

See if you can hold the handstand for 30 seconds without coming down or breaking form. If that's too easy, try a minute.

Legs

CALF RAISES

Stand on a beam or mat with your heels hanging off of the edge. Quickly rise onto your toes as high as you can, extending all the way through the feet. Make sure your feet stay pressed

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together and remain straight. Slowly lower back down until your heels are off the edge again, and then repeat.

CANDLESTICK TO A JUMP

To achieve a candlestick position, lie on your back and lift your toes and hips toward the ceiling. As you become more comfortable, you should be able to balance on your shoulders.

Roll down from the candlestick to your feet, and then immediately jump up. When you land, roll back into the candlestick and repeat.

Flexibility:

Flexibility

THE TOP 3 GYMNASTICS STRETCHES YOU SHOULD PRACTICE

Stretching is one of the most under-utilized techniques for improving athletic performance, preventing sports injury and properly rehabilitating sprain and strain injury. Don't make the mistake of thinking that something as simple as stretching won't be effective. Below are 3 very beneficial stretches for gymnastics; obviously there are a lot more, but these are a great place to start.

Gymnastics-stretch_1 Arm-up Rotator Stretch:

Stand with your arm out and your forearm pointing upwards at 90 degrees. Place a broom stick in your hand and behind your elbow. With your other hand pull the bottom of the broom stick forward.

Gymnastics-stretch_2 Standing High-leg Bent Knee Hamstring Stretch:

Stand with one foot raised onto a table. Keep your leg bent and lean your chest into your bent knee.

Gymnastics-stretch_3 Squatting Leg-out Adductor Stretch:

Stand with your feet wide apart. Keep one leg straight and your toes pointing forward while bending the other leg and turning your toes out to the side. Lower your groin towards the ground and rest your hands on your bent knee or the ground.