

# BECOMING

## A CONSISTENT COMPETITOR

Age: 10/11 – 13+ years (females)

12-15+ years (males)

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

Gymnasts may remain in this stage for several years

Athletes who progress to this stage are passionate about their sport and committed to a competitive career. They are high-level provincial stream, national stream, or high performance athletes who enjoy meeting a challenge. These are years of **investment**, in which the participant becomes solely committed to gymnastics, is focused on achieving an elite standard, and builds a close relationship with the coach.

Gymnasts have consolidated all basic skills, are developing and refining advanced skills and are performing routines of increasing complexity and difficulty. Gymnasts must now learn how to compete well under a variety of conditions. They will reach an optimal performance state that will enable them to meet their individual performance goals.

During this stage, almost all female, and many male gymnasts will be going through puberty. Coaches must be vigilant about monitoring growth, noting PHV and adjusting training programs to allow recovery, accommodate changing body sizes and reduce the possibility of injury. Coaches must be aware that each gymnast will develop at a different time and different rate. Individuality and flexibility of training programs are extremely important in this phase.

Monitoring is important for all gymnasts, regardless of their level of participation. Coaches, parents and athletes must be patient as fast growing athletes may show some skill regression and reduced training capacity. With the sudden change in body size, limb length and body proportions, general and specific skill performance may deteriorate. Basic skills may need

to be emphasized to accommodate these changes. It may be necessary to temporarily restrict the number and type of competitions to allow the gymnast to adapt to his or her changing body and to reduce the stress on the body, thereby reducing the possibility of injury and early retirement.

More focus is needed on the emotional and social impact of this growth spurt on the athlete. Coaching methodology should be adjusted to properly address the impact of these changes. Ensure that the needs of the gymnast are matched to the appropriate program, coach and club environment.

Competition becomes more important, with the focus on achieving consistency and quality of performance, and on learning to cope with the physical and mental challenges of competition. Results only become important toward the end of the stage, when athletes are being selected onto national teams.

## What qualities will be developed in this stage?

- Gymnasts must develop advanced skills early in the stage, before the onset of the growth spurt
- Educate gymnasts about nutritional requirements for adolescent athletes
- Provide opportunities to foster positive body image, high self-esteem and confidence
- Refine routine skills performed at high quality and intensity. Consolidate and increase the variety of elements
- Increase difficulty and artistry; develop individual creative expression
- Flexibility and symmetrical development must be emphasized, given the rapid growth of bones, tendons, ligaments and muscles
- Spatial orientation development must be emphasized as perceptual judgement skills mature in this stage. Use trampoline for training spatial orientation
- Incorporate aerobic endurance, speed and strength training; develop core strength
- For females, strength gains are seen immediately after Peak Height Velocity (PHV) and again with the onset of menarche. For males, strength increases 12-18 months after PHV, after the rate of growth slows
- Aerobic trainability improves after the onset of PHV. Aerobic training is important to recovery and the ability to withstand the demands of training, but it must be planned to develop a sport-appropriate level of aerobic endurance, while not interfering with power development
- Consolidate and refine stress management and competition preparation strategies; learn how to manage distractions and different environmental demands
- The gymnast gains independence in decision-making. While coach input is essential, the gymnast becomes responsible for many decisions that affect training and competition
- Develop ability to deliver consistently good performances at important competitions
- Gym rules relating to safety and accepted social behaviour need to be reinforced. The participant learns to accept consequences of behaviour
- Sports ethics should include ethical issues related to competition
- Encourage life balance through outside interests
- Emotional development (e.g. mood) is different between males and females

## What does NOT belong in the gymnastics program?

- Inflexible approach to training that does not consider individual levels of maturation
- Elements on knees or going down on the knees should be taught and used with caution
- Repetitive lower back hyperextension skills
- Repeated impact activities that can cause epiphyseal damage
- High resistance training and high muscular loads that can result in apophyseal avulsion injuries
- “Rushing” skills to the next level before the basic skill and physical preparation are well established (e.g. adding a second twist before the gymnast is fully comfortable performing a single twist)
- Over-emphasis on competition at the expense of skill development

## Performance Qualities

- Gymnasts in this stage are competing at provincial, national and international levels
- Expectation is that performance will be of consistently high quality. Gymnasts must strive for perfection in skill performance
- Gymnasts should learn to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. Routines should be planned to highlight strengths and minimize weaknesses
- Careful planning is required in selecting competitions for specific purposes
- Single or double peak periodization
- The focus of international competition is on learning how to compete under FIG rules, exposure to other cultures and on learning to cope with the physical and mental pressures of travel, training, competition and officiating in another country.

## Amount of Time in Gymnastics

- Provincial level athletes: 3 or 4 times per week for 3-4 hours per session; maximum of 16 hours per week
- National and HP level WAG and MAG athletes: 5-6 times per week for 3-4 hours per session; maximum 24 hours per week. Younger athletes should be training less hours than the maximum.
- National and HP level RG athletes: 5 times per week for 3.5 to 4 hours per session, including ballet preparation; maximum 20 hours per week. Younger athletes should be training less hours than the maximum.
- AG gymnasts: 12-16 hours per week

- TG gymnasts: 9 to 15 hours per week
- Number of weeks per year: 45-48
- Goal-setting should be realistic and appropriate to the maturity and ability of the gymnast

## Role of Parents

- Parents tend to move into the background and play a less direct role in the gymnast's sporting career, but they still provide emotional and tangible support.
- As the gymnast becomes more responsible for decision-making, the parents continue to provide support, but allow increased independence of the gymnast. They must continue to provide a "positive push", and be available when the gymnast needs guidance.
- Parents remain active as volunteers within the club
- Parents ensure that the gymnast's schedule is organized, and that there is a balance between gymnastics and other aspects of the gymnast's life (social, school, family). This may entail some sacrifices within the family, as the overall schedule is organized around gymnastics. There will be limited vacations, few family meals.
- Parents should remain aware of the needs of other family members, and cultivate an environment of mutual support. Siblings often help out at club events and competitions, but it is important that they find their own niche.
- Parents will be driving several times per week to training and competitions
- Parents will continue to pay for training and competition costs, equipment and clothing, private or specialized coaching, and other related costs (e.g. nutritionist, physiotherapy, psychologist). Travel costs to competitions may increase significantly if the gymnast is attending international events that are self-funded.

## Monitoring

- As intensity and volume of training increase, general health must be monitored regularly
- Ongoing screening for hip and knee alignment, and imbalances in strength and flexibility will help reduce the risk of injury
- Monitor iron levels in female athletes annually
- Pay special attention to PHV; monitor standing and sitting height, arm span and weight every three months
- Physical abilities testing; active flexibility testing is particularly important during PHV
- Monitor skills, technique and difficulty
- Monitor emotional development. Be aware that girls are at an increased risk for lower moods, which can increase the risk of depression, eating disorders and low self-esteem
- Educate gymnasts about doping control at the end of this stage

## Events and Activities

- Canadian Championships, Eastern and Western Canadian Championships, Provincial Championships, Canada Games and Provincial Games
- Selection events
- Special performances and demonstrations (club, provincial, national)
- Selected international competitions at the Junior level

**Programs:** Provincial competitive programs

National competition structure and system

AG Canadian Program

Special Olympics Canada competition program

**Type of Coach:**

NCCP Certified

Competition-Development (early in stage)

NCCP Certified Competition High-Performance (later in stage)

Special Olympics Canada Competition Coach

