

British
Gymnastics



ENGLISH
INSTITUTE
OF SPORT

Flexibility Training

British Gymnastics Position Statement

Revised: June 2022



British Gymnastics has developed the following position statement in conjunction with the English Institute of Sport. After reading this document, if you have any questions or concerns, please contact British Gymnastics Integrity team.

In gymnastics, flexibility is an integral part of the sport, and a flexibility programme should be encouraged as part of gymnastics training. Flexibility training performed correctly will increase the range of motion necessary for many skills, increase the performance potential and may reduce the risk of an injury. Conversely, poor practice may lead to an injury and/or have a negative psychological impact. This position statement has been developed to provide current recommendations and guidance for best practice around flexibility training in gymnastics.

British Gymnastics acknowledges we all have a duty of care to safeguard the physical and psychological health of gymnasts.

Flexibility training must always be gymnast-centred and must not go beyond mild pain/discomfort to the individual. The gymnast must have the ability to stop at any point.

Key Recommendations

1. The proportion of training spent on flexibility should be in line with the level of gymnast (i.e., recreational vs competitive) and discipline requirements.
2. A flexibility programme should account for individual abilities and anatomical differences, be progressive and achievable. Any flexibility training should not exacerbate any injuries if present.
3. During periods of rapid growth, flexibility is likely to decrease. It is important that coaches and gymnasts are sensitive to these changes, aware of the potential psychological and physical issues that may occur as a result, and refrain from overloading flexibility training as a means of compensating for these changes. Emphasis should be on the maintenance of flexibility rather than improvement.
4. Flexibility training should always take place in an open environment where adults are present including one appropriately qualified coach.
5. The gymnast's joints and muscles should be thoroughly warmed-up before participating in flexibility training.

6. There are a variety of different methods that can be used during flexibility training (e.g., static, active, passive, proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation, dynamic). These can be gymnast led or coach/peer assisted. It is recommended that:
 - i. Coaches only apply the techniques which they have formally learnt through education courses, and which is within the scope of their practice.
 - ii. Wherever possible, flexibility training is gymnast-led (i.e., hands-off approach).
 - iii. Any peer assisted flexibility training is guided and or directly supervised by an appropriately qualified coach.
7. Facilitation of any flexibility training must be done with an awareness of proximity to a gymnast (i.e., positioning). It is important that a gymnast does not feel vulnerable, or their dignity compromised during any form of flexibility training. Facilitators should be mindful of how their proximity and handling may be perceived by other individuals (see infographic for more details).
8. An open and honest dialogue (e.g., pain thresholds, feeling of stretch etc) should take place during any flexibility training. Communication between the coach and gymnast is key.
9. Clubs, coaches, and instructors should endeavour to educate gymnasts and parents/guardians on the importance and best practices for flexibility training in gymnastics.

World Class Performance Programme (WCPP) Practices

The following information highlights the practices of the WCPP regarding flexibility training in gymnasts.

- During camps, every session will likely include some form of flexibility training, usually at the end of training sessions.
- Squad gymnasts are encouraged to maintain and improve flexibility in line with their discipline and performance requirements.
- At camps, flexibility may be monitored.
- Where possible, it is recommended gymnasts have access to ballet to enhance flexibility. In some disciplines, qualified ballet teachers are often present and may lead on flexibility training within the scope of their practice.
- As part of rehabilitation, physiotherapists may assist with flexibility training within the scope of their practice.

Definitions

Flexibility Training: Training that intends to increase the range of motion around a joint.

Mild Pain: Pain that is rated between 1-3 out of 10 (see British Gymnastics Position Statement: Pain, injury and gymnastics for more information).