Gymnastics
Training, Health, and Fitness Guide

A quick-start resource for all levels of coaches.

Table of Contents *Note- Page numbers in packet will not line-up with numbers listed below*

- Health and Fitness Talk 2-12
- Practice Considerations 13-16
- Sample practice plan 17

Partially sourced from: Special Olympics International Artistic Gymnastics Coaching Guide
HEALTH and FITNESS TALK

Suggestions for including a focus on year-round health and wellness in your sports practice.

“To be a great athlete, you need to be a healthy athlete.”

These discussions are laid out in balance, order, and accordance with Special Olympics Montana’s 8 weeks – 10 hours practice requirements. An included practice plan, which shows how these discussions can fit in a practice, is included in this same packet.

The goal of Health and Fitness Talk is to support the health, fitness, growth, and success of Special Olympics Montana competitors. It is designed to be used as a part of your practice season. The following discussions will provide competitors with the introductory knowledge to begin thought processes on:

- Identifying nutritious choices
- Balancing nutrition and portions
- Making healthy and balanced snack and meals choices
- The importance of hydration
- Identifying unhealthy beverage choices
- Understanding endurance and strength
- Understanding flexibility and balance
- Understanding the benefits and fun of exercise

If you are interested in a more in-depth Health and Fitness Program, explanations, examples, and lesson plans/guides, reach out to the Special Olympics Montana Senior Director of Innovation at 406-216-5327.

Practice Week #1 Discussion: NUTRITION: Eating right is important to your health and your sports performance. Eating right can be easy and enjoyable because there are many delicious healthy choices.

Your goal is to eat at least 5 total fruits and vegetables every day!

Tell your teammate the names of some Fruits:

- Fresh: Apples, Bananas, Berries, Grapes, Kiwi, Oranges
- Frozen Fruits
- Canned fruits (pick options with no added sugar)
- Dried fruits: Raisins, Bananas, Apricots

Tell your teammate the names of some Vegetables:

- Fresh: Asparagus, Broccoli, Carrots, Cauliflower, Green Beans, Peppers, Squash
- Lettuces and Dark Leafy Greens
- Frozen Vegetables
- Salads
- Canned Vegetables
-What fruits can you have for breakfast? Lunch?
-What vegetables can you have for lunch? Dinner?

You know fruits and vegetables are important for your health, but sometimes it can be difficult to know what other foods you should be eating. Here is a list of the other food groups and some great choices in each group that make up a healthy meal or diet.

**Grains:**
- Brown or Wild, or Unpolished Rice
- Oatmeal
- Whole Grain Bread
- Whole Grain Pasta
- Whole Grain Crackers
- Tortilla
- Flatbread

**Diary:**
- Low-fat or Skim Milk
- Low-fat Cheese
- Low-fat, unsweetened yogurt (watch the sugar!)
- Cottage Cheese

**Meats and Beans (Protein):**
- Lean Meats
- Eggs
- Fish (frozen, fresh or canned)
- Nuts
- Beans

-Tell your partner the Grains you ate yesterday. Dairy?
-Share with a teammate what protein (Meats & Beans) you had last night for dinner.

**Practice Week #2 Discussion:** **BUILDING A HEALTHY PLATE:** From last time, you now know what types of foods to eat. Here is how to build a healthy plate for a meal or for a snack.
- Watch the amounts of food you put on your plate (share/discuss the “Perfect Portions” diagram below).
- Save junk food like desserts, chips and sodas for special occasions.
- Make half of your plate fruits or vegetables (see diagram below).
- Fill the other half with foods like whole grains, dairy, and protein.
- Add more fruits and vegetables to your meals.
- Keep snacks healthy and small.

-Tell your teammate how to build a healthy plate.
-Name the 4 food groups that should make up a healthy meal.
Here is a fun way to remember how much to eat when you have a serving. The size of sports equipment on the left is about the same size as one serving of the foods on the right.

**Diagram:**
- **Baseball:** 1 serving of fruit
- **Football:** 1 serving of pasta
- **Basketball:** 1 serving of nuts
- **Horseshoe:** 1 serving of cheese
- **Pickle:** 1 serving of butter

**Instructions:**
- Make half of your plate fruits or vegetables.
- Fill the other half with foods like whole grains, dairy, and protein.
Practice Week #3 Discussion: **HEALTHY SNACK IDEAS:** Snacking is a great way to make sure you are full of energy. It is important to keep your snacks healthy. Here are a few ideas for tasty snacks that are packed with fruits and vegetables.

- Apple slices dipped in peanut butter
- Low-fat unsweetened yogurt with berries
- Low-fat cottage cheese with tomatoes
- Carrots or peppers dipped in hummus
- Celery topped with peanut butter and raisins

-What snacks do you like the most? Are these healthy snacks or junk food snacks?
-Tell your partner a healthy snack you could make for yourself.
-Are these healthy snacks (thumbs up) or junk food snacks (thumbs down)?
  - Doritos
  - Banana with peanut butter
  - Snickers candy bar
  - A half cup of nuts
  - Carrot sticks
  - A cookie

**HEALTHY MEALS:** Add more fruits and vegetables to your meals. You can make any meal more nutritious with these simple suggestions.

**Breakfast**
- Have a piece of fruit with your meal.
- Vegetables like spinach, tomatoes, onions and peppers make great toppings on omelettes.
- Dried or cut fruit make great toppings on cereal and oatmeal as well.

**Lunch**
- Top sandwiches with plenty of vegetables like lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, and sprouts.
- Try apples, carrots, or celery for a crunchy side.
- Add leftover or canned vegetables like peas and carrots to soups.
- Make a salad with your choice of meat, cheese, lots of vegetables, and an oil-based dressing.

**Dinner**
- Add vegetables like broccoli, squash, or peppers to pastas.
- Make a stir-fry with brown rice, your favorite lean meat or seafood, and vegetables.
- Add a side of steamed vegetables or a salad to any meal.
- Have some fruit as a healthy dessert.
Practice Week #4 Discussion: HYDRATION: Water is another important fuel for sports and for life. Drinking the right amount of water is important for your health and can also help your athletic performance.

Your goal is to drink 5 bottles of water every day! Your water bottle should be 16-20oz or 500-600ml. Drink out of a sports water bottle to track your water intake. Sports bottles are refillable and can hold 16-20oz or 500-600ml of water.

-Do you have a water bottle? Do you take it with you when you go places? Do you bring it with you to practice?

-Are you drinking water with your meals?

SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION: Water helps to keep your body working properly. You lose water when you go to the bathroom, sweat, exercise or even breathe. If you lose too much water without drinking more, your body won’t work as well. This is called dehydration.
**Signs of Dehydration:**

- You feel thirsty
- You are tired or sluggish
- You have a headache
- Your mouth is dry
- Your urine is dark yellow or brown

-Tell your teammate two of the signs of dehydration.

-Have you ever been dehydrated? How did you know? How did you feel?

**Practice Week #5 Discussion:**

**HEALTHY BEVERAGE CHOICES:** There are many beverage options available, but some of them are healthier choices than others. This guide can help you make the best choices to stay hydrated and perform your best.

-What is your favorite thing to drink? How often do you drink it (most days, sometimes, special occasions)?

-What is the best thing to drink (water)? Why (no sugar)?

**Sodas, energy drinks, and sports drinks are NOT good beverage choices.**

Sodas, energy drinks, and sports drinks have extra sugar and can make you gain weight. Energy drinks and many sodas also have caffeine. Caffeine does not help you stay hydrated.

**Moderate amounts of low-fat milk and 100% juice are also good choices in small amounts.**

Low-fat milk and 100% fruit juice are good choices with meals. Keep serving sizes small. No more than 3 cups of milk and 1 cup of juice per day.

**Water is the best choice for a beverage!**

Drink water every day! If you like flavored drinks, try sparkling water or add a few pieces of fruit into your water bottle.
You might consider bringing in some beverages and having your athletes look at the number of grams of sugar in each one. The athletes could count out the number of sugar cubes represented in each drink.

4 grams of sugar = 1 sugar cube

- How does it make you feel knowing that there are 10 teaspoons of sugar in a can of Coke?
- Do sports drinks like Gatorade have sugar in them? TV ads don’t tell you that, do they?
**Practice Week #6 Discussion:** EXERCISE- Endurance & Strength: You can become a better athlete by enjoying physical activity outside of your sports practice. There are many ways to be physically active. Certain exercises can help you improve the skills needed for your sport. **Your goal is to do at least 5 days of exercise every week!**

*Types of Exercise: ENDURANCE STRENGTH FLEXIBILITY BALANCE*

**Endurance is the ability of your body to keep moving for long periods of time.** Endurance can help you run farther distances without stopping and practice longer with fewer breaks.

**Try your favorite endurance exercise for 30 minutes, 5 days each week.**
**Strength**

*Strength is the ability of your body to do work.* Strength gives you the ability to jump higher, throw farther, and sprint faster.

**Try to complete a workout for the entire body, 2-3 days each week.**

-Is dancing exercise? *(Yes, endurance.)*
-Running, biking, and swimming are examples of what type of exercise? *(Endurance)*
-Push-ups and sit-ups are what kind of exercise? *(Strength)*
-What exercise do you do for endurance? *(Strength)*

**Practice Week #7 Discussion: EXERCISE- Flexibility & Balance:**

**Flexibility** is the ability of your body to move easily in all directions. Being flexible makes it easier to do sports skills and helps prevent injuries to your muscles and joints!

**Balance** is the ability of your body to stay upright or stay in control of your movements. Balance helps you to stay in control when you are playing sports and helps you to avoid falls.
Flexibility is the ability of your body to move easily in all directions. Being flexible makes it easier to do sports skills and helps prevent injuries to your muscles and joints!

Try to complete a stretch for all body parts, 2-3 days each week!

Note: Dynamic stretching should be done as part of your warm up. Static stretching should be done as part of a cool down.

Balance is the ability of your body to stay upright or stay in control of your movements. Balance helps you to stay in control when you are playing sports and helps you to avoid falls.

Try to complete a full body balance workout, 2-3 days each week!
Practice Week #8 Discussion: **EXERCISE IS FUN!**

**Exercise is Fun!**

*It is easy to get in the right amount of exercise if you make it fun. Here are some tips to help you stay motivated to reach your Fit 5 goal.*

- **Exercise with a friend or group!**
  - Go on a walk, run, or bike ride with a friend or family member.
  - Join a group exercise class.
  - Do strength training with a teammate.

- **Take the lead at practice!**
  - Ask your coach if you can lead some flexibility or strength exercises.
  - Teach a friend a new sport.

- **Try something new!**
  - Try a new group exercise class.
  - Walk or run a different route than you normally do.
  - Learn a new strength or flexibility exercise.

- **Track your improvements!**
  - Write a goal on a piece of paper. Post the goal on your wall.
  - Keep a log of your exercises so you can see your progress.

Doing exercise together is a fun way to socialize with friends and family.
- **How many of you could walk with a friend after school or work?** Attend an exercise or fitness class? Bike on a trail? Take a walk with your mom or dad?
- **What is a new exercise you would like to try?**
- **Share your exercise goal with a partner.**

The diagrams in this document are from the Special Olympics *Fit 5 Guide*.

Other resources:
- **NCHPAD.org** This website has lots of health resources for people with disabilities. They have articles, videos, and even workout plans.
- **ChooseMyPlate.org** This website has it all! Learn how many servings of each food group you need, track your eating to see if you are eating healthy, and even find links to healthy recipes.
- **EatRight.org** This website also has loads of nutrition information, healthy recipes, and even a section to find a dietitian in your area.
- **Heart.org** (click on the heading, “Getting Healthy”) The American Heart Association has great resources for leading a healthy lifestyle, including a nutrition center with tons of recipes and cooking videos for heart-healthy recipes.
- **Diabetes.org** (click on the heading, “Food & Fitness”) The American Diabetes Association has lots of great articles for people who have diabetes. There are also many diabetes friendly recipes!
### Principles of Effective Training Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keep all active and controlled</th>
<th>Gymnast needs to be an active listener</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create clear, concise goals</td>
<td>Learning improves when gymnasts know what is expected of them</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give clear, concise instructions</td>
<td>Increase accuracy of instruction by using all modalities – visual, verbal, and kinesthetic in instructions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Record progress</td>
<td>You and your gymnasts chart progress together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give positive feedback</td>
<td>Emphasize and reward things the gymnast is doing well. Corrections should be stated positively – what you want them to do.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide variety</td>
<td>Vary drills and use circuits – prevent boredom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourage enjoyment</td>
<td>Training and competition is fun, help keep it this way for you and your gymnasts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create progressions</td>
<td>Learning is increased when information progresses from:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Known to unknown – discovering new things successfully</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simple to complex – seeing that “I” can do it</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General to specific – this is why I am working so hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan maximum use of resources</td>
<td>Use what you have and improvise for equipment that you do not have – think creatively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allow for individual differences</td>
<td>Different gymnasts, different learning rates, different capacities. Teaching needs to use verbal comments, visual demonstrations, and kinesthetic practice. Use picture cues, videos of good performances, and other gymnasts to demonstrate what you want.</td>
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Tips for Conducting Successful Training Sessions

- Safety checks of equipment and practice area before each session.
  - Mats in correct placement?
  - Are beams straight?
  - Bars are adjusted and tightened?
  - Vaulting board have correct # of springs for athlete's size?
- Assign assistant coaches their roles and responsibilities in accordance to your training plan.
- When possible, have all equipment and stations prepared before the gymnasts arrive.
- Introduce and acknowledge coaches and gymnasts. Always meet and greet gymnasts.
- Review intended program with everyone. Keep gymnasts informed of changes in schedule or activities.
- Alter the plan according to the facility and equipment in order to accommodate the needs of the gymnasts and explain when necessary.
- Change or adopt activities before the gymnast become bored, and loses interest.
- Keep drills and activities brief. Keep everyone busy.
- Devote the end of the practice to a fun, group activity that can incorporate challenge and fun always giving them something to look forward to at the end of practice.
- If an activity is going well, it is often useful to stop the activity while interest is high and before gymnast is fatigued.
- Summarize the session and announce arrangements for next practice.
- Keep the fun in fundamentals.
Tips for Conducting Safe Training Sessions

Though the risks can be few, coaches have a responsibility to ensure that gymnasts know, understand and appreciate the risks of Gymnastics. The safety and well-being of gymnasts are the coaches' primary concerns. Gymnastics is not a dangerous sport, but accidents do occur when coaches forget to take safety precautions. It is the head coach's and everyone's responsibility to minimize the occurrence of injuries by providing safe conditions. Risk management should always be considered. Prevention is first. Safety is a journey that should never end.

- Establish clear rules for behavior at your first practice and enforce them.
  1. Keep your hands to yourself.
  2. Listen to the coach.
  3. When you hear the coach – Stop, Look, and Listen
  4. Ask permission before leaving the gym to go anywhere.
  5. Gymnasts should not be in the gym or on equipment without proper supervision.
- Make sure gymnasts bring water to every practice or provide a water fountain, especially in hotter climates.
- Check your first aid kit; restock supplies as necessary.
- Train all gymnasts and coaches on emergency procedures.
- Discuss safety in the gym as well as outside the gym (i.e. parking lot). Have rules about not walking in front of a dismount area; being careful around mats of different heights, etc.
- Teach gymnasts to look before walking.
- Check the equipment daily. Are all T handles and cables secure? Tripping areas eliminated? All hazards should be eliminated in the facility.
- Review your first-aid and emergency procedures. Have someone who is trained in first-aid and CPR on or very near to the gym during practice and games. Do you know where the AED device is and how to work it?
- All hazards should be eliminated in the facility.
- Warm up and stretch properly at the beginning of each practice to prevent muscle injuries.
- Train to improve the general fitness level of your gymnasts. Physically fit gymnasts are less likely to get injured. Make your practices Active.
- Require all your gymnasts to wear appropriate uniforms. Loose clothing can get caught around a bar, in a spotters hand, etc. No jewelry should be worn and long hair tied up.
Safety in the Gym
Safety is everyone’s concern:

- All coaches should follow the above chart.
- Parents should make sure their child is on time for warm ups and well rested.
- Gymnasts should pay attention and follow directions at all times. If not, stop the activity.

Prevention of injuries is a priority ... we need

- Safe programs
- Safe environments
- Safe coaches

Who is responsible? Everyone

- Properly plan activity (ies)
- Supervise (general to specific)
- Proper instruction
- Safe physical environment
- Provide adequate and proper equipment
- Educate yourself regularly
- Have an appropriate emergency plan/assistance
- Keep informed of gymnasts moods, feelings, medical issues, etc.
- Keep records forever.
- Medical information available? Where is phone? AED? Etc.
- Become safety certified with your National Governing Body. (i.e. USA Gymnastics, BAGA)

Gymnastics Practice for Competitions
The more we compete, the better we get. Part of the strategic plan for Special Olympics Gymnastics is to drive more sport development at the local levels. Competition motivates gymnasts, coaches and the entire sport management team. Expand or add to your schedule as many competition opportunities as possible. We have provided a few suggestions below.

1. Host Meets – invite another local gym/program over.
2. Join the local community Gymnastics Clubs and/or associations.
3. Have practice meets– invite spectators
4. Incorporate competition components at the end of every training session. To practice doing a skill/routine under pressure – have the entire team watch.

Hosting a Gymnastic Meet
(NOTE: Look on the SOI website for more information on this.)

Your Special Olympics area directors and state office should always be aware of any meets you plan on hosting and approve them. Discuss dates and times with them. Meets for Special Olympics athletes are run the same as meets for NGB gymnasts. The difference is in the awards ceremony. In Special Olympics, everyone is a winner, so everyone goes up to the awards stand for every event and All Around.
Training Plan with Health and Fitness Elements

Elements of a safe and successful practice

- Check area for safety hazards
- Warmup
- Stretching
- Skills practice
- HYDRATE!!!
- Competitive/fun session
- Cool down
- Health and fitness discussion
- Wrap-up and conclusion
- *Elements can be added and subtracted, as desired*

1.25 hour practice plan example

- 8:30-8:40 – Coach arrives and checks area for safety hazards.
- 8:45-8:50 – Walking or jogging to warm-up muscles.
- 8:50-9:00 – Stretching
- 9:00-9:15 – Skills practice
- 9:15-9:20 – Water break
- 9:20-9:30 – Skill practice
- 9:30-9:40 – Competitive/fun session
- 9:40-9:45 – Cool down
- 9:45-10:00 – Health and Fitness Discussion, Wrap-up, and conclusion