

ACTIVE START

AGE 0-6 YEARS* – BOYS AND GIRLS

0 - 18 month: infant
(child with parent or caregiver)

18 months - 3 years: toddler, mature walker
(child with parent or caregiver)

3 - 6 years: preschool independent

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

Gymnastics is the ideal Active Start activity. Gymnastics Canada is one of only a few national sport organizations with specialized programming for this age group. All preschool-aged children should have the opportunity to participate in a gymnastics program.

An Active Start gymnastics program should be structured around creating movement challenges for participants to explore and resolve. Participants will progress at their own rate, and the program structure should allow for individual differences. The program must be holistic, child-centred, and develop cognitive, psycho-social, motor, and physical qualities. The language of instruction must be appropriate to the age and developmental level of the participant.

Through age-appropriate activities, and using adapted equipment, participants will be introduced to the Fundamental Movement Patterns: Landings, Static Positions, Locomotions, Rotations, Swings, Springs and Object Manipulation. The quality of movement for each of these patterns will be extended and enhanced through the use of music, rhythm and the principles of dance.

Gymnastics-based activity will:

- Enhance development of brain function, coordination, social skills, gross motor skills, emotions, leadership and creativity
- Help participants build confidence, independence and positive self esteem
- Support healthy growth and development: build strong bones and muscles, improve flexibility, develop good posture and balance, improve fitness, promote relaxation, improve sleep, promote healthy weight
- Help participants move skilfully and enjoy being active
- Provide participants with a movement base that will support lifelong enjoyment and participation in almost any sport.

What qualities will be developed in Active Start gymnastics programs?

- Fundamental Movement Patterns
- Gross motor skills (e.g. running, jumping, climbing, rolling, twisting, kicking, throwing, catching)
- Motor qualities of agility, balance and coordination
- Physical qualities such as strength and flexibility
- Cognitive development stages in laterality, patterning, directionality, space and body awareness, communication and problem-solving
- Creative movement and make-believe
- Exposure to music and dance activities
- Participants learn to explore space in a safe manner, learning to control their own movement in relation to equipment and others. Good class management ensures safety.
- Group social skills are developed as a basis for future sport ethics
- Psycho/socio development – desire to be active, self-confidence to try, self-expression and group social skills such as cooperation

Participants with a disability are often integrated into able-bodied programs, particularly where a support person, parent/guardian can participate. The “fun” environment, individualized progress and safe, specialized equipment in an Active Start program is very appropriate. In the case of some disabilities, specific medical clearance may be required prior to registering for an Active Start gymnastics program.

* In Active Start participants are identified by stage of development (not age). Each stage has a plus/minus 4 month expected minimum variant associated with the approximate ages listed above.

What does NOT belong in an Active Start gymnastics program?

- Repetitive and prolonged activity; competitive-type training
- Focus on training gymnastics “skills”
- Risky positions and exercises e.g. hurdlers stretch, inverted bridges, headstands, straight leg stretches, head rotations, candle stands, V-sits, jumping jacks
- Activities and equipment that are not appropriate, or which have not been adapted for small children
- Flexibility training
- Inflexible directed teaching approaches

Performance Qualities

There is no place for competition in an Active Start gymnastics environment. But because young children love to show and perform, activities should encourage the development of:

- Group social skills – interactions, sharing, taking turns, helping
- Showing what you can do
- Self-expression
- Confidence

Amount of time in gymnastics

- Under 4 years of age: 30-45 minute classes, once per week for 10-36 weeks of the year
- 4-6 years of age: 45-60 minute classes, once or twice per week for 10-36 weeks of the year
- Participants with an intellectual disability: begin with 30- 40 minute classes and progress to 60 minutes, once or twice per week
- Participation in other, non-structured play activities is encouraged.

Role of Parents

- To introduce participants to a range of activities, provide encouragement and participate in activities such as parent days, shows, and parent/child classes
- Must be prepared to transport participants to activities, and to pay for these activities

Monitoring

- Development of Fundamental Movement Patterns
- Social skills
- Emotional & behavioural stabilities
- Cognitive abilities

Events and activities

- Show & tell during and at end of each class
- Share with others in class
- Class closing activity
- Special event theme days
- Performance of “Rou-tinys” (short movement sequences) and mini-displays

GCG programs for this stage: GCG NCCP Active Start Coach Training program

Type of coach: NCCP Foundations to Gymnastics coach with Active Start Coach specialization

Special Olympics Canada Community Coach program

Other specialized training for coaches of athletes with a disability

