

# Fun & Fit Fitness

USA GYMNASTICS

**Begin Here. Go Anywhere.**

Remember when gymnastics was just a sport for the talented few? Wow – how things have changed! The industry of gymnastics is now in full bloom and millions of children in almost every city in America are enrolled in clubs, mobile programs or recreational centers offering gymnastics classes for kids. One of the reasons so many kids today are loving gymnastics classes is the fun and excitement they experience while learning new skills and getting in shape.

It's no secret that gymnastics develops your body in a positive way – just look at a gymnast! Every muscle in your body is used when doing gymnastics. And, unlike some sports that use one side of the body more than the other for throwing a ball or swinging a club, gymnastics can help children develop healthy posture while increasing flexibility, coordination, agility, balance and strength in ways that improve performance in all other sports.

But, as much as our industry has grown, so has the youth fitness crisis in America. Sadly, there are more kids today that are unfit, out of shape and overweight than ever before. These kids are also at risk of developing serious health related problems as a result of their obesity and sedentary lifestyles. And, year after year, the Surgeon General of the United States informs us that the problem is getting worse. In fact, with all we know about health and fitness, many kids today have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.

## Why are so many kids unhealthy? And what can we in the gymnastics industry do about it?

Well if you ask me, we can do a lot about it! In fact, we may be in a better position to make a positive difference than almost anyone else because we start kids in gymnastics at such a young age.

There are two factors to consider: the quality and quantity of food kids eat and their level of activity (or inactivity).

- **NUTRITION:** Clearly the quality and quantity of food we eat affects us. And the unhealthy fast food marketed to children impacts their lives in a negative

## Fitness through Gymnastics

## Making a positive difference in the lives of children

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By Jeff Lulla Founder and President of Fun & Fit Gymnastics

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way. Whatever we can do in our clubs to increase awareness of healthy eating habits for children (and their parents) we certainly should be doing. It's exciting to learn that USA Gymnastics is committed to help us get the word out in this area.

- **ACTIVITY:** Why do so many kids drop out of sports and live sedentary inactive lifestyles? Research tells us the main reason kids participate in sports is to have fun, while the reason they quit is that it's not fun anymore. Clearly, the focus on competition in sport can have a negative impact on those who are not successful (it's no fun to lose). So, to keep kids enrolled, we have to keep it fun. And to keep it fun, we have to help kids feel successful.

### KEEPING IT FUN WITH PROGRESSIONS AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS

Did you know the entertainment industry makes more money from video games than from movies? Ask yourself, why are so many kids hooked on video games? I believe it has a lot to do with how they are designed to allow kids to succeed easily at level 1 and progressively get more challenging. (Hey, did I say progressively? Aren't "progressions" how we teach gymnastics?) And, just like in gymnastics, when you challenge yourself with achievable goals and then reach them, the feeling of accomplishment and success you experience is fun and exciting. And it's addicting. You get hooked and want to play again.

Successful gymnastics clubs today know how to make learning successful, fun and exciting for all children. They are in the business of recreational gymnastics for the masses, focusing on the benefits gymnastics education provides children, and making lots of money in the process. Because their students are happy and learning, they stay enrolled for years and, as a result, develop greater fitness and lasting fitness habits. Many clubs today offer competitive teams while a growing number do not. Those clubs with competitive teams and profitable recreational programs are usually more successful at competitions because they have the resources to provide for the needs of the team members.

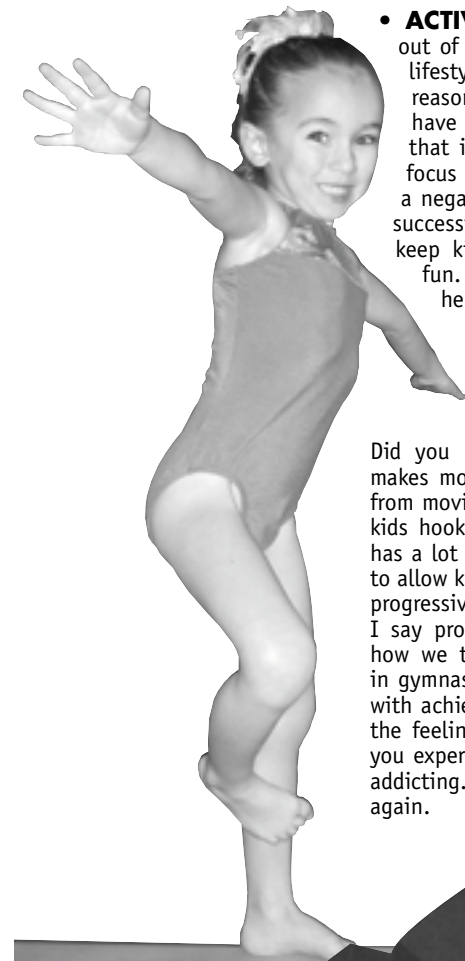
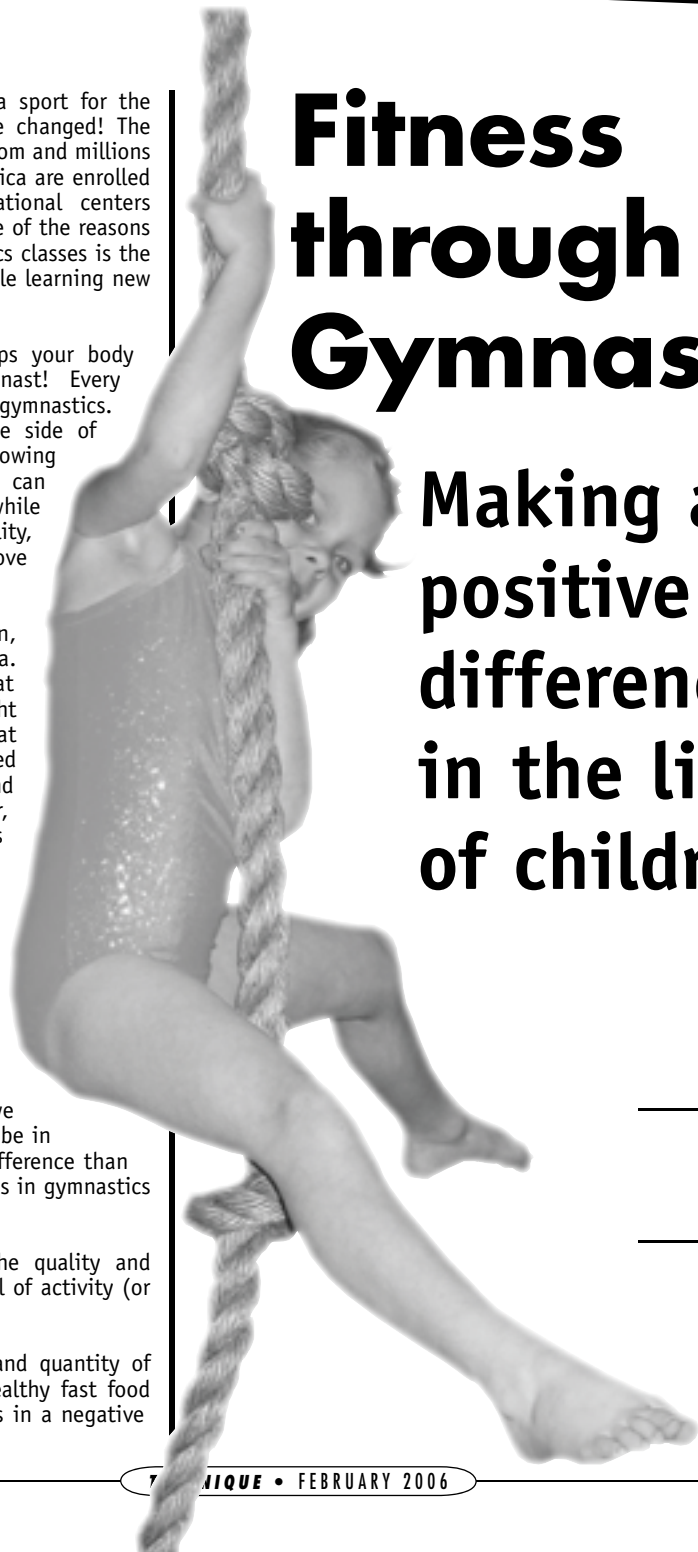
Parents used to think enrolling their child in a gymnastics program necessitated a desire to eventually compete in the sport of gymnastics (if the child was talented and/or lucky enough). And it was that kind of thinking that kept our industry small. As parents learn that gymnastics is an activity that kids need to participate in to have fun, get fit and be safe with movement, and that gymnastics education results in a healthier lifestyle and better performance in all sports (as well as improved cognitive ability and better grades in school), enrollment in gymnastics schools increases.

After years of educating parents on the many benefits gymnastics education provides to children, we are only now beginning to experience the fruits of that effort. And as we move forward with our thoughts on fitness for kids, even more opportunity awaits us.

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**Jeff Lulla earned a B.A. degree in Physical Education and has over 30 years of coaching experience. Lulla owns and operates two Fun & Fit Gymnastics Centers in Calif., and also contracts with private schools and their local city Park and Recreation Departments teaching gymnastics. Lulla also licenses a self-esteem building curriculum called the Fun & Fit Gymnastics Program. As a member of the National Preschool Committee, Jeff co-authored the KAT course, is a member of the National Safety Review Board and is a National Safety Instructor for USA Gymnastics.**

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transfer the gymnast's body weight from his/her hand to the wrist. When an athlete slides the handgrip down on the wrist and then swings on the bars the handgrip will slide back to the intersection of the hand and wrist every time because that is where they were designed to be worn. If an athlete has severe chafing or sores around the wrist he/she will try to move the handgrip up the wrist. This method will not correct the problem because the grip will slide back to the correct position when in use. Over time this creates friction on the wrist with undesirable results. Wearing handgrips in the proper location and a good pair of wristbands should solve this problem. It is a good idea to keep your wristbands clean and in good condition and to discard worn or thin wristbands. Clean wristbands cause less friction and less blistering and will help prevent infection when blistering does occur.

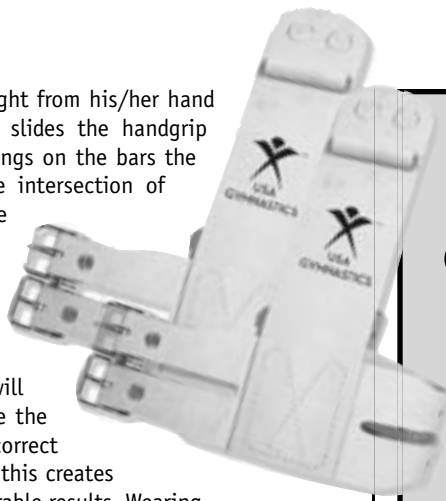
Suppliers are also often asked to recommend velcro or buckle closure. This decision is a personal choice. What does the athlete or coach prefer? Velcro is easier for younger athletes, but many higher-level coaches prefer buckles because they are more secure and the athlete does not have a tendency to wrap and unwrap the velcro closure constantly throughout a workout. Constant wrapping and unwrapping the velcro straps on their handgrips causes the velcro to wear out long before the useful life of the grip.

Athletes often complain about breaking in new handgrips. The tendency to strap on handgrips and start swinging as a method of breaking them in is not recommended. A baseball player would never take a new baseball glove and start playing baseball with it without first following a break-in process that will soften and shape the glove for use. The same applies to gymnastics grips. When leather is tanned it is soaked in various tanning agents, and when it dries, it becomes fairly stiff or firm in temper. A gymnast needs to break the stiffness out of the handgrips.

The procedure for doing this is fairly simple. Start with the finger holes pointing upward and the dowel facing you, wrap the leather around the dowel and roll the grip down to the cuff. Follow this procedure again with the dowel facing away from you. You will notice an immediate difference in the softening of the leather. Perform this step several times on each handgrip and the wrist cuffs as well. Never pinch the leather sharply together. This could be detrimental to the leather. It is then okay to start using your handgrips in slow under swings until the grips feel comfortable enough for more advanced stunts and full giant swings. The results should be surprising.

Regarding the finger holes, the rolling process above should soften them to a comfortable fit. But if they are still too small or tight for your fingers, follow this procedure. Use a small piece of sandpaper (many brands supply it with the grips). Wrap it around a pencil and slowly and carefully sand around the finger holes. This will open the hole consistently around the opening without tears. Never stretch the opening by hooking it on something and pulling and never cut the holes with a knife. This can weaken or damage the leather beyond repair or safe use.

When not in use it is a good idea to store your grips in a separate bag to protect them from damage from other items in your gym bag. This will also keep the chalk and smell of the grips from transferring to the other items in your gym bag. Another accessory that is useful



# How To Measure Grips and Wrist Supports

## Palm Guard Grips

Measure the right hand from the base of the palm (where palm meets the wrist) to the base of the middle finger (where middle finger and palm meet.)

Measurements	Size
Up - 2.5"	XXS
2.5" - 3"	XS
3" - 3.5"	SM
3.5" - 4"	MED
4" & Up	LG

## Dowel Grips

Measure the right hand from the base of the palm (where palm meets the wrist) to the tip of the middle finger.

## Women's Dowel Grips

Measurements	Size
4.5" - 5"	000 - XXXS
5" - 5.5"	00 - XXS
5.5" - 6"	0 - XS
6" - 6.5"	1 - SM
6.5" - 7.25"	2 - MED
7.25" - 8"	3 - LG
8" - 8.75"	4 - XL

## Men's Dowel Grips

Measurements	Size
Up to 5.25"	00 - XXS
5.25" - 6.25"	0 - XS
6.25" - 7.25"	1 - SM
7.25" - 8"	2 - MED
8" & Up	3 - LG

is a grip brush that is used to carefully brush any excess chalk build up on the front of the grip. Use a grip brush in moderation and be careful not to damage the leather.

To answer the question of water usage on handgrips, we defer to Mike Jacobs, the author of this article and the founder of US Glove Grips and the manufacturer of such popular brands as US Glove, RKO, Millennium, Omega and Hot Shot Grips. He is recognized as an expert in the leather business for 35 years and in the handgrip business for 20 years. He has spoken with several tanneries about leather and without exception all have said that water usage is not recommended. Water can cause deterioration and rotting, as well as stretching of the leather. This can shorten the life of your grips.

Follow these suggestions and gymnasts should have a long-lasting, safe, comfortable use of their gymnastics handgrips.