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CrossFit
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Why Train Gymnastics Basics?

Jeff Tucker



Questions I constantly hear from folks out there in the world of CrossFit are: Why should I train gymnastics? Why should I, of all people, attend a gymnastics certification? And what exactly will I learn that will be useful?

This sentiment, expressed by a woman from Texas, is common: *“I mean, all I can do is a mediocre handstand and I can’t tumble. I always wanted to do gymnastics as a kid but I just never got into it for one reason or another. I just feel like I would suck at it and I really don’t know what I would get out of [attending a clinic]. It looks so hard! Are you sure I should attempt such tricks?”*

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This is a natural response from those out there who aren't sure how to begin incorporating gymnastics into their training or ponder what cert to experience next as they weigh the benefits of such knowledge. We all know that learning basic gymnastics elements is a foundational part of your CrossFit training and development. Their relevance for training strength and body control are obvious, but they offer much more than that. The ability to move one's body weight effortlessly and with confidence will transfer in strengths across the board in your training and daily life.

My personal experience bears this out. Throughout my twenty years of service with the Fort Worth (Texas) Fire Department I had one constant on my mind; I knew I was more agile, stronger, and a more confident firefighter than those I worked with simply because I had been trained as a gymnast. I knew my body's limitations and strengths as I was trained in my youth to use my entire body and to do so with strength, speed, endurance, and utmost control. Gymnastics prepared me for the toughest career of my life to date and I still retain many of those skills at age 45. You need to know how to move your body. You also need to know that you can do the movements required for CrossFit

WODs with confidence. All you need do is listen, apply maximum effort, and practice diligently.

Whenever I stop by a CrossFit gym or someone comes into to GSX Athletics (my gymnastics facility and CrossFit affiliate in Fort Worth), I invariably end up teaching something from my days as gymnastics competitor and coach—whether it's getting someone to understand how to stretch their glutes and hamstrings for better L-sits or how to position the rings for better stability in a muscle-up, or the basics of getting into, or holding, a solid handstand. Knowing the nuances of form and some fundamental mechanics from basic gymnastics will allow you to excel.

Getting yourself some gymnastics training means acquiring important knowledge about the basics of how to spot, support, and cue the forms, both for your own training and for coaching others. Safety needs to be a major part of any teaching progression. We have a saying at GSX "small moves bring great rewards," and we mean it. For example, you'll learn things like hand placement for handstand push-ups, how to be hollow and what advantage it offers when doing handstands, how to do handstands specifically for parallette

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The scalability question concerning gymnastics is one I am often asked. Just how do you scale and train gymnastics transitions and elements? It all seems so complex and difficult and foreign in the beginning. The short answer is that it is easy to scale gymnastics and even easier to instruct beginning moves for muscle-ups, ring work, bar variations, handstands, handstand push-ups, parallettes, and ground-based skills—if only you know the cues and training methods for developing strength and core control. Give me a couple of power bands and a pull-up bar and I will have you doing several gymnastics moves unassisted in 60 seconds—all of them scaled to your ability level.

work, how to come out of a handstand safely, how to spot safely, and how to know when your body is not responding properly so you can correct your form. All these points are extremely important. You will learn how to break down these teaching transitions and not rush to the next progression until you (or your trainees) are adequately prepared to do so. This approach applies for work on the bar, parallettes, rings, and ground; for flexibility, strength, core, and control work; and so much more.

Learning to train using static apparatus such as stationary dip bars and pull-up bars versus the dynamic plane provided by rings will allow you to come to know your body through stabilization and strength and thus develop the areas you are weakest in. Positioning yourself in a dynamic environment like the rings requires remarkable strength, focus, and attention to the details of proper form. Accordingly, the benefits are immeasurable. You will learn that there are many ways to skin a cat and become fit and well-rounded, and that there are many ways to scale these progressions to make them gradually accessible to almost anyone.



Why Train Gymnastics Basics? (continued...)

Another salient issue in teaching and learning gymnastics elements is knowing when to say when. Sometimes you need to pull back (or pull your clients back) and show them that they have yet to master the intricacies of a skill they are training, even when they seem to have the basics under their belt. In my opinion, teaching people to accept repetition and gradual progress in training these skills is one of the hardest ideals to impart to people. Everyone wants the skill right now. (Greg Glassman decries this “novice’s curse” in his inspiring essay “Fundamentals, Virtuosity, and Mastery.”) Clients and trainers alike need to know and learn that gymnastics elements take time and practice, lots and lots of practice. Lots. This especially applies to the fittest CrossFitters—those who are accustomed to pushing beyond normal endurance levels, who sometimes go until they drop. Yes, mastering this stuff takes hard work, but you can’t bring it into being by sheer force. It also takes patience and incrementalism. It’s OK to take a break to analyze and work out issues in your head before attempting moves that you have yet to master. And it’s OK—unavoidably necessary, in fact—to build gradually, mastering one step in a progression before rushing on to the next one.

“If you insist on basics, really insist on them, your clients will immediately recognize that you are a master trainer. They will not be bored; they will be awed. I promise this. They will quickly come to recognize the potency of fundamentals. They will also advance in every measurable way past those not blessed to have a teacher so grounded and committed to basics.”

—Greg Glassman, “Fundamentals, Virtuosity, and Mastery”



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When we teach a gymnastics certification seminar, our primary emphasis is on everyone learning to repeat moves safely and properly once they return home. We want everyone to walk away with the idea that gymnastics training will not be taught or learned overnight. It may come easier for some and harder to learn for others, but we all strive toward good form and control in these strength and control skills. Whatever the individual starting point, virtuosity is always the goal. So much can and will be gained from training gymnastics elements once you master the basics; then, you can push your mind and body toward more difficult progressions and higher-level gymnastics transitions. More importantly, trainees can help other like-minded people around them to learn the importance of training gymnastics elements for CrossFit. Success will come with small moves, and the rewards for such training are waiting around the corner. You just need to take the first steps.



CrossFit.com online instructional videos and demos by Jeff Tucker

Core Control Basics - Pt. 1	[wmv]	[mov]
Core Control Basics - Pt. 2	[wmv]	[mov]
Core Control Basics - Pt. 3	[wmv]	[mov]
Core Control Basics - Pt. 4	[wmv]	[mov]
Developing the L-Pull-up - Pt. 1a	[wmv]	[mov]
Developing the L-Pull-up - Pt. 1b	[wmv]	[mov]
Handstand Drills	[wmv]	[mov]
Handstand Drills - Pt. 2	[wmv]	[mov]
Pull-up Bar Drills	[wmv]	[mov]
Pull-up Bar Drills: Moving Toward the Front Lever	[wmv]	[mov]
Pull-up Bar Drills: Moving Toward the Front Lever - Pt. 2	[wmv]	[mov]
Playing With Handstands	[wmv]	[mov]

Jeff Tucker (just “Tucker” to most folks) is a retired 20-year member of the Fort Worth Fire Department, where he served as a firefighter and arson/bomb investigator. He was head coach and director of Texas Christian University’s gymnastics/cheerleading programs from 2001 to 2006, and he holds a multitude of degrees and certifications. He currently owns and operates [GSX Athletics](#) in Fort Worth, Texas, which specializes in Tae Kwon Do, gymnastics, CrossFit, and private athletic instruction.