



IGAT

WEIGHING & DIETING GYMNASTS POLICY

Version 1.0



Version History

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Introduction

The Independent Gymnastics Association (IGA) is committed to providing a safe and supportive environment for all gymnasts. This policy aims to establish clear guidelines on weighing and dieting, ensuring that gymnasts' physical and mental well-being are prioritised. We strive to foster a culture that encourages respect, personal autonomy, and healthy practices in all aspects of training and competition.

Key Responsibilities

- **Coaches and Staff:** It is the responsibility of coaches and staff to ensure that gymnasts receive appropriate guidance and support regarding health, nutrition, and body composition. Coaches should always approach weighing and dieting matters with sensitivity and respect. Clubs should also provide staff with training on best practices for handling sensitive issues related to weight, body image, and dieting. Welfare officers within clubs are also integral to monitoring and supporting gymnasts' well-being and ensuring that any concerns regarding their physical or mental health are addressed.
- **Gymnasts:** Gymnasts have the right to make informed decisions about their bodies and their health. They should feel comfortable discussing concerns and know they will be supported if they need help.
- **Parents/Guardians:** Parents are encouraged to be involved in conversations regarding their child's health and well-being. Coaches should keep them informed about any concerns related to their child's weight or body composition and seek advice from medical professionals when necessary.
- **Health and Medical Professionals:** Professionals such as GPs, nutritionists, and physiotherapists are critical in offering expert guidance on diet, body composition, and general health. They should be consulted for advice whenever there are concerns about a gymnast's health.
- **Clubs** must establish a clear policy on the management of weight, dieting, and overall health of gymnasts. Clubs should ensure that all coaches, staff, and welfare officers are trained on the principles of safe, healthy, and respectful weight management practices. They should foster an environment where the well-being of the gymnast is prioritised over performance pressures. support when needed.

Preventing Poor Practice

To prevent any harm to gymnasts, the following measures should be implemented:

- **Training and Education:** All staff and gymnasts should be educated on healthy body image, nutrition, and the importance of psychological well-being. This helps ensure that all parties are informed and can make decisions that promote long-term health and performance.
- **Avoiding Negative Language:** The use of critical or demeaning language related to body weight or composition is strictly prohibited. Negative comments can harm the mental health of gymnasts, and all staff members must use respectful and professional language at all times.
- **Professional Oversight:** Any discussions around dieting, weight concerns, or body composition should be conducted by qualified professionals (e.g., GPs, nutritionists). Coaches should avoid providing advice outside their scope of expertise.

Safeguarding Policy - Weighing Gymnasts

Weighing gymnasts is a sensitive practice that requires the utmost caution and should only be conducted under appropriate conditions to protect the physical and psychological well-being of gymnasts.

Key Principles

- **Prohibited in Gymnastics Environments:** IGA does not condone weighing gymnasts within the gymnastics environment under any circumstances. The act of weighing can create undue pressure or stress, and it is essential to separate this practice from training and performance settings. Any concerns related to a gymnast's weight or body composition must be referred to a qualified healthcare professional.
- **Professional Oversight:** Weighing should only be conducted by certified healthcare professionals, such as GPs, dietitians, or physiotherapists, who are equipped to assess and interpret weight in the context of overall health and development. This ensures that the process is handled with care, precision, and the necessary medical knowledge.
- **Voluntary Participation:** Gymnasts should only be weighed with their informed consent (verbal & written consent). They must fully understand why weighing is being requested and have the right to decline without fear of reprisal. Participation must always be voluntary, and gymnasts should never feel pressured to comply.
- **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Weighing must take place in a private medical setting, ensuring confidentiality and discretion. Results should remain confidential and shared only with the gymnast, their parents or guardians, and the healthcare professional. No data should be disclosed without the gymnast's explicit permission.



- **Monitoring for Well-being:** Coaches and staff should not initiate discussions about weighing or body composition without prior consultation with a healthcare professional. Any concerns observed by coaching staff, such as signs of fatigue or difficulty performing skills, should prompt a conversation with the gymnast's parents and a referral to a medical expert.
- **Focus on Holistic Health:** Weight should never be the sole metric for assessing a gymnast's health, performance, or fitness. It is vital to understand that body weight fluctuates naturally and does not always reflect changes in body composition. Coaches and staff must ensure that the gymnast's overall health and mental well-being are prioritised above all else.
- Gymnasts and parents/carers (in the case of minors) have the right to refuse or withdraw consent at any time without any consequence.

Guidelines for Coaches and Clubs

- Avoid discussing weight or body composition during gymnastics sessions.
- Direct any weight-related concerns to parents and healthcare professionals rather than addressing them directly with gymnasts.
- Refrain from comparing gymnasts' weight or body composition to each other.
- Ensure that all staff are trained in safeguarding principles related to body image and nutrition.

By adhering to these principles, IGA aims to create a safe, supportive environment where gymnasts can focus on their performance and development without unnecessary or harmful stressors related to weight.

Safeguarding Policy - Dieting Gymnasts

Dieting practices for gymnasts must always prioritise their long-term health, physical development, and overall well-being. The focus should be on providing balanced nutrition to support performance and recovery, rather than encouraging short-term weight management strategies that could harm the gymnast's health.

Balanced Nutrition

Any dietary advice provided to gymnasts should emphasise a well-rounded, nutrient-dense diet that meets the gymnast's energy needs, particularly during periods of intense training or growth. This should include an appropriate balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals to ensure the gymnast has the fuel required for training, recovery, and general health. Diets should never be overly restrictive or fail to meet the gymnast's nutritional needs.



Avoiding Restrictive Dieting - Gymnasts should never be encouraged to follow extreme or overly restrictive dieting practices that limit calorie intake or eliminate key food groups. Such diets can result in nutritional deficiencies, physical weakness, and psychological distress. Coaches and staff must remain vigilant to ensure gymnasts are not exposed to harmful weight-loss practices and that sustainable, healthy eating habits are promoted. The emphasis should always be on overall health and nourishment, not achieving a specific weight or appearance.

Professional Guidance - All dietary advice or adjustments to a gymnast's diet should come from certified nutritionists or dietitians experienced in working with athletes, especially those in developmental stages. Coaches and parents should avoid giving dietary advice unless they hold the necessary qualifications. This ensures that any dietary modifications are based on scientific principles and tailored to the gymnast's individual needs.

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Monitoring Health - Gymnasts should be regularly monitored for signs of poor nutrition, energy deficiency, or psychological distress linked to dieting. Coaches and welfare officers should watch for symptoms such as fatigue, irritability, difficulty concentrating, or changes in mood that may indicate issues with nutrition or unhealthy dieting practices. If any concerns arise, healthcare professionals, such as GPs or nutritionists, should be consulted to assess the gymnast's overall health and well-being. Early intervention is essential to prevent more serious physical or psychological issues.

Psychological Well-being - Dieting and weight concerns can have a profound impact on a gymnast's mental health. It is vital to maintain a supportive, open environment where gymnasts feel comfortable discussing any concerns about their body or diet. Coaches and staff must be trained to recognise the signs of eating disorders or body image issues and to respond sensitively and appropriately. Negative language or comments regarding weight or body composition should never be used, as they can contribute to unhealthy attitudes towards food and body image.

- For more information on eating disorders: <https://www.independentgymnastics.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/310724-Eating-Disorder-Awareness-Doc-1.pdf>

Good Practices Guidelines

Everyone involved in gymnastics has a vital role in creating a safe and supportive environment for gymnasts, focusing on their physical and psychological well-being. Adopting the following good practices is essential:

Respectful Language

Language matters significantly when addressing gymnasts. Coaches, staff, and other members of the gymnastics community must avoid making subjective or critical comments about a gymnast's weight, body, or appearance. Remarks that are belittling, humiliating, or otherwise negative constitute emotional abuse and can have lasting psychological effects. Positive and constructive communication should always be prioritised to foster confidence and a healthy self-image.

Body Composition, Not Just Weight

Weight alone is not an accurate indicator of a gymnast's health, fitness, or performance capability. Body composition, which examines the proportions of muscle, fat, and other elements in the body, provides a more meaningful understanding of an athlete's physical condition. However, assessing body composition should only be conducted by qualified professionals using appropriate methods (e.g., DEXA scans or ISAK techniques). Gym environments are not suitable for such evaluations.

Education and Informed Decision-Making

Empowering gymnasts with knowledge about how their bodies function and how nutrition impacts performance is vital. Gymnasts should be educated on the principles of balanced nutrition, energy needs during training, and the importance of recovery. Providing them with accurate, evidence-based information allows them to make informed and autonomous decisions about their health, minimising reliance on external pressure.

Prioritising Mental Health

Mental health is as crucial as physical fitness in gymnastics. The pressures associated with weight and performance can affect a gymnast's emotional well-being. Coaches and staff should foster a supportive, non-judgmental environment where gymnasts feel comfortable expressing concerns. Access to mental health support, such as counsellors or psychologists familiar with athletes' needs, should be readily available to help gymnasts manage stress, body image issues, or other challenges.

Minimising Focus on Weight

Weighing practices, when necessary, should be minimal and approached with care:

- **Frequency:** Weight measurements should not occur more than once a month to avoid unnecessary stress and misinformation caused by daily fluctuations.
- **Purpose:** Weighing should only occur if there is a medically valid reason, such as tracking growth during adolescence under professional supervision.
- **Environment:** Weight should never be taken in the gym environment. Instead, it should be managed by healthcare professionals in an appropriate setting.



Privacy and Consent

Gymnasts have a right to privacy and autonomy regarding their weight and body composition. Any discussions, assessments, or records involving these topics must respect their confidentiality. Consent should be obtained before taking any measurements, and gymnasts should never feel coerced into providing such data. They retain control over their personal information, and no data should be shared without explicit permission.

Fostering Healthy Habits

Coaches and staff should promote sustainable habits rather than short-term fixes. Encouraging balanced meals, regular hydration, adequate sleep, and rest periods ensures gymnasts are physically and mentally prepared for the demands of training and competition. Health, performance, and safety must always take precedence over aesthetic considerations.



Useful Contact Information

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