



8 Reasons Why Children Should Take Gymnastics

By Dr. Robyn J.A. Silverman, PhD

As educated adults in today's world, most of us already know the importance of physical activity in a child's life. It's not only recommended by the Center for Disease Control (CDC), the American Heart Association and other knowledgeable governing bodies, it is downright necessary for healthy living. It's ironic isn't it, that as we have become more aware of the need for physical activity, schools have cut back on physical education due to budgetary constraints and mandated testing requirements? The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics clearly shows that children are becoming more overweight and our population as a whole is becoming more obese. These trends, coupled with an ever more techno-savvy yet sedentary lifestyle have led to more TV watching and not surprisingly, more health issues among our young people.

Luckily, we have options. We can seek out a gymnastics academy that can provide a great physical program to help our children create a healthy lifestyle. But just as important, we can seek out a club that provides our children with a place that stimulates their brains, exercise their social skills, encourages personal development, and fosters a sense of well being all at the same time.

Physical Benefits

Gymnastics can endow children with great physical benefits. From muscle strength and balance to healthy bones and flexibility, gymnastics provides an exciting option for parents who know the value of a full body workout.

1. Muscle Strength: Gaining muscle strength through tumbling, jumping, static flexing, and holding one's own body weight in various positions help children develop strong and powerful bodies. Muscle is built through resistance training, which allows children to use their body's resistance as their own personal weight machine! Over time, these gymnasts get stronger, which aids in the development of lean, toned muscles, improved balance and perhaps even improvements in posture.

2. Healthy Bones: These same types of movements assist children with developing strong healthy bones since gymnastics is a weight-bearing activity. Weight-bearing activities, according to the CDC, are activities in which the child's body works against gravity, meaning that a child's legs, feet or arms are actually supporting or carrying his or her own body weight.

3. Flexibility: A by-product of gymnastics, flexibility is, simply put, the ability to move the muscles through their full range of motion. Because gymnasts aim to achieve a variety of positions to perform skills on each apparatus, flexibility is important. In everyday life, it reduces tension, helps coordination, develops body awareness and promotes circulation.

Because gymnastics provides fun skills that children can practice at home, they will be more likely to engage in physical activity even between gymnastics classes. The more we can get children up off the couch and moving, the healthier they will become.



Non-Physical Benefits

A great gymnastics club that provides stimulation, age-appropriate curriculum and terrific instructors who care about their students, can help children yield other important non-physical benefits from gymnastics. Cognitive, social, and psychosocial benefits might not be as obvious as a toned muscle, but there is no question that they are there.

4. Cognitive Benefits: When children are engaging in gymnastics, they are exercising their brains as well as their bodies. New research suggests a strong correlation between physically fit children and academic achievement. Every time you send your child to gymnastics class, he/she is engaging in physical exercise that encourages healthy brain function. Nerve cells multiply and connections in the brain are strengthened. It is not surprising that children who are engaging in consistent physical activity like gymnastics are more likely to get better grades than their inactive peers.

5. Social Skills: Children can also benefit socially from engaging in gymnastics. Aside from simply interacting with other children in the class, some gymnastics clubs also encourage teamwork and partner drills in their classes. The more children can interact with different types of children both in school and in after-school programming, the more they will learn how to handle conflict and positively relate to others.

6. Reduced Risky Behavior: Gymnastics clubs can provide a stable, reliable physical activity source for both children and teens. Young people who are consistently physically active are much less likely to engage in using tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. When children can find positive, active ways to keep busy in a place that you can trust, they will not have to make up ways to occupy their time that could lead to poor or risky choices.

7. Confidence: Instructors at gymnastics clubs using a supportive, mastery oriented approach can help their budding athletes develop a wonderful sense of confidence. While physical activity tends to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, the right instructors help children develop an "I can" attitude that can give them that intangible high of knowing they can count on themselves to succeed.

8. Character: Some gymnastics clubs are now incorporating formalized, age-appropriate character education programs into their curriculums so children learn to be better citizens, not just better gymnasts. Clubs that integrate powerful monthly lessons on respect, self control, responsibility, confidence, sportsmanship and other character-based concepts can help children strive to become their very best both within the gymnastics club and out in the community.