
SPECIAL OLYMPICS WORLD GAMES

Gymnastics



ABOUT SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Special Olympics Healthy Athletes® is the world's largest inclusive health programme focused on the needs of young people who have intellectual impairments.

This is important as for many people around the world there are still huge health inequalities. Healthy Athletes® addresses this through free health screenings, education and referrals for continuing treatment.

At the Special Olympics World Games, athletes receive sight and hearing tests, a dental check-up, footcare and physiotherapy, as well as advice on prevention and positive mental health.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS GYMNASTICS

- Special Olympics gymnastics competition consists of two events – artistic and rhythmic.
- Artistic gymnastics have been part of Special Olympics sports since 1972. Rhythmic gymnastics was added in 1991.
- In artistic gymnastics, women can choose from 4 disciplines – vaulting, uneven bars, balance beam and floor exercise – or combined, where their score over all four disciplines is added together. In men's artistic, in addition to vaulting and floor exercise, they can also compete in pommel horse, rings, parallel bars and horizontal bar.
- Rhythmic gymnastics is open only to female competitors (as in the International Gymnastics Federation rules). Athletes perform with a piece of apparatus – rope, hoop, ball, ribbon or clubs. There are also two group events – with and without apparatus.



GYMNASTICS IN SCHOOL

The Special Olympics gymnastics disciplines can be recreated in school PE. For example:

BALANCE BEAM

- Use throw-down markers or a thin piece of string taped to the floor. This can be in a straight line at the beginning, then meander in different directions.. Try walking along the line and follow it to the end. Then turn and return to the start point.
- Those using mobility aids can travel between two parallel lines.
- Time how long it takes to complete the course. Add on 3 seconds if you lose balance and step off the line.

VAULTING

- Try vaulting (or jumping) over a line on the floor. Rather than going for distance, try to add another movement to the jump. For example, a kick, a turn in the air or an arm movement. If you use a mobility aid, try to add artistic movements of arms, body or legs as you travel a short distance.
- (See 'Athletics jumps' for more options).

POMMEL HORSE

- Instead of movements on this apparatus, sit, or be positioned, on the floor. Explore ways of moving whilst staying in contact with the floor. For example, balancing, sliding, spinning, rolling and stretching.

RHYTHMIC

- Choose a skipping rope, a small ball, a plastic hoop or a piece of ribbon. Invent as many ways that you can of moving with your chosen item.
- For example, stepping (or pushing in a chair) and stopping to bounce a ball in different places and on all sides of your body. Or swirl a piece of ribbon as you move, making patterns in the air.
- Then try again, this time to music, where you can use the rhythm to emphasise your movements.

MOVEMENT EXPLORATION

Gymnastic movement can begin with some basic, simple ideas. For example:

BALANCE

- How many different ways can you balance? For example, on tiptoe, on one leg; or using a different number of limbs to achieve a balance; four limbs touching the floor, just three, two – and finally – one.
- Or if you are seated, try balancing an object, such as a bean bag, on different parts of your body. For example, on the back of a hand with arm outstretched; or on one shoulder, or on your head. Try balancing the object whilst remaining still; then introduce some slow movement, like turning your body in different directions.

SPEED PLAY

- Perhaps using fast and slow music, try moving quickly and then in slow motion. If you are seated, you can move your arms fast (pumping) or very slowly (waving, like corn a field).

FREEZE IT!

- Try moving around the playing area, in any direction, perhaps to music. When the music stops, freeze like a statue! Try and throw different shapes – tall (stretched), very small (curled up) or wide (sideways stretch).

Use the STEP adaptation tool to make changes to these activities and ensure that everyone is included.

SPACE

- A bigger space encourages more big movements while a small space can help you focus on small gestures.
- A smaller space also encourages more interaction with others.

TASK

- Experiment with different kinds of movement; for example, big steps or arm swinging, and then sometimes very small steps and fine movement of the fingers, hands and arms.
- Those using mobility aids, such as wheelchair users, can alternate big pushes, covering a lot of distance, with small, gentle pushes, perhaps using these to change direction.

EQUIPMENT

- Try using a prop (piece of apparatus) to develop and support new movement ideas. As in the Special Olympics, you could use a hoop, a ball, a piece of rope or a ribbon. But you can also think about other items that you could use; for example, a frisbee, which you can throw and catch, but which you could also spin on your fingers, knee, or even head!

PEOPLE

- When practising balance, as well as using a wall or a chair for support, you can also work with a partner. One person can support their partner who is balancing (perhaps on one leg). Or both partners can find a way of balancing at the same time whilst also providing each other with support.
- A person who is using a mobility aid, or who has a vision or other perceptual impairment, can work with someone who has a wider range of movement. Find ways of supporting each other.

SAFETY

- Always be aware of each other's movement capabilities. Some people may need more space or reaction time.