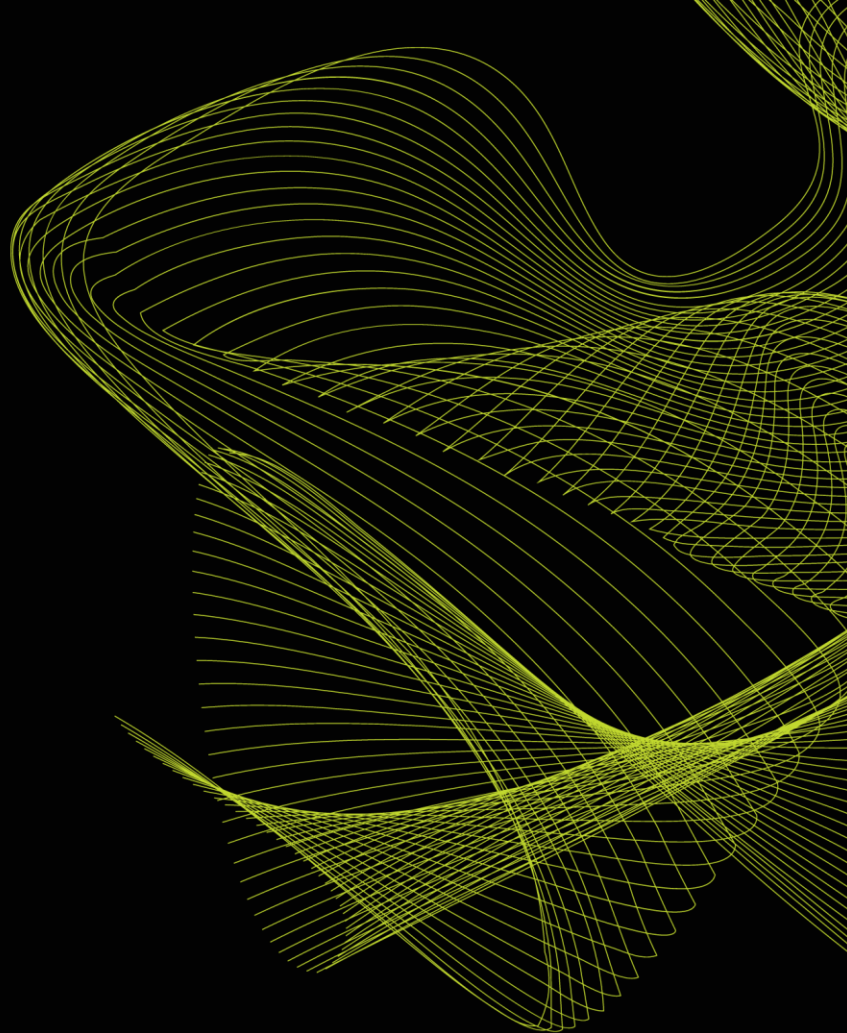




Gymnastics Ireland

Stretching Policy 2026+

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to outline the core principles for safe developmentally appropriate stretching for our members across all gymnastics activities and programmes from club to national/ international level. Technical methods and progressions are provided in Gymnastics Ireland (GI) Training Courses and continuous professional development (CPD) modules.

2. Scope

These guidelines apply to all GI registered clubs & members including gymnasts, coaches, staff and contractors across all training, competition and training camp environments. This includes club training and National Squad/Centralised Programme training. A specific CPD course delivered via the GI eLearning platform is a requirement for all GI registered Level 2 (or above) coaches and is recommended for all GI registered coaches regardless of level.

The following rules, policies and documents support this policy & procedure and must be adhered to.

Gymnastics Ireland Rules & Regulations
GI Complaints & Disciplinary Rules and Procedures
Safeguarding Guidance for Children and Young People in Sport in GI
Gymnastics Ireland Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Policy/Strategy
Gymnastics Ireland Codes of Conduct
Gymnastics Ireland eLearning Training Course & CPD Modules
Gymnastics Ireland Coaching Policy

3. Definitions

Codes of Conduct	The Gymnastics Ireland Codes of Conduct embody the collective commitment and individual responsibilities of all who participate in the sport through transparent standards of conduct and a commitment to ensuring a safe environment for everyone in all aspects of training, competition, and sports operations. In addition to the Codes of Conduct, please refer also to the following World Gymnastics Code of Conduct
Coach / Consultant	Any coach/consultant engaging in gymnastics activities for children and young adults, including in a GI registered club facility, National Squad, Centralised Programme or Club Development Session, Training Camp, National or International Event
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
eLearning platform	The Gymnastics Ireland Learning Management System
GI	Gymnastics Ireland
GI Member	A member of a GI registered club
PNF	Proprioceptive Neuromuscular Facilitation (<i>only permitted with a medical professional</i>)
Stretching	The structured use of movement of held positions to increase, maintain, or optimize the flexibility and functional range of motion required for safe skill execution, artistry, alignment or overall physical preparation. Definitions of stretching techniques are included in Section 4.3 - Types of Stretching
WG	World Gymnastics (Formerly International Gymnastics Federation)

4. Core Principles

Gymnastics Ireland (GI) maintains that our member clubs, coaches, consultants and staff have a responsibility and duty of care in ensuring stretching exercises are undertaken in line with current best practice and with due regard to the health, safety and welfare/safeguarding of all members.

4.1 Stretching Guidelines

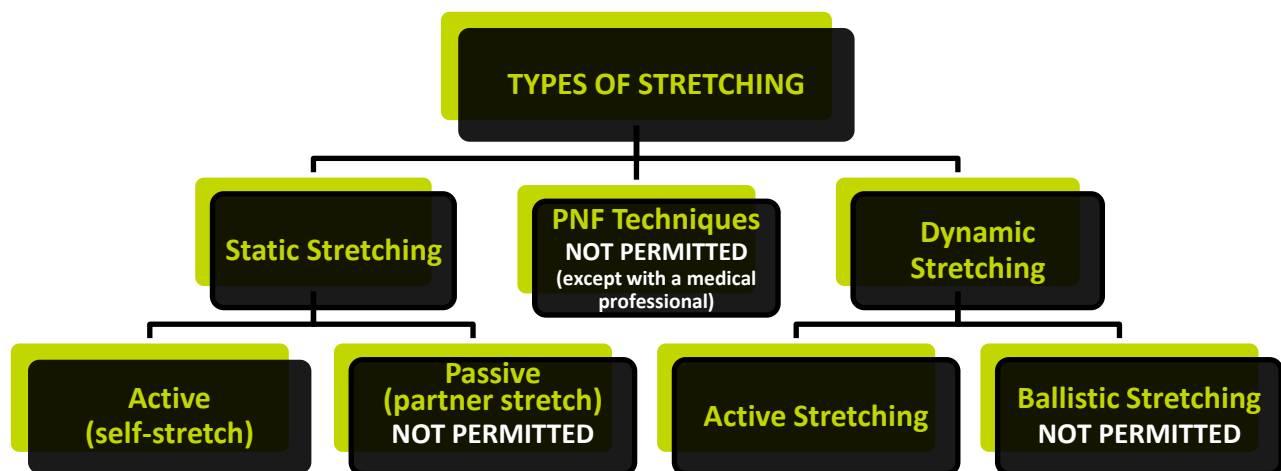
- Stretching must be safe, progressive, and never forced or be painful. Pushing into a painful stretch can be counterproductive, as the muscle will likely contract to resist the stretch
- Stretching is best done when the muscle is warm and relaxed
- Post training session can often be a good time for stretching, where the aim is to increase flexibility
- Flexibility increase - Static stretching is an effective method to increase flexibility:
 - Hold the stretch x 30 seconds
 - Repeat 2-3 times
 - Repeat 3-5 times per week
- There is no benefit to holding a static stretch for longer than 30 seconds. After 30 seconds it is recommended to come out of the stretch first and then repeating the stretch. Alternatively, after 30 seconds, you can proceed deeper into the stretch, as the muscle allows.
- Flexibility gains happen over months – not minutes. To increase flexibility, the muscle needs to be exposed to the stretch on a regular basis for at least 4-8 weeks.
- Partner static and coach assisted proprioceptive neuromuscular facilitation (PNF) stretching is not permitted - (*except with a medical professional*) - it increases the risk of injury to the joint and surrounding muscles, ligaments and tendons.

- Gymnasts should perform stretches independently, at their own pace, using feedback from their muscles to determine the depth of stretch.
- Coaches must follow Gymnastics Ireland approved methods from formal coach education courses and non-formal specific stretching training (CPD).

4.2 Range of Motion

- There are several reasons why a gymnast may have a restriction in range of motion of a particular joint. Muscle tightness, while a common reason, is only one of these reasons.
- When stretching a muscle, tension is also applied to other structures such as the joint capsule and fascia (connective tissue surrounding the joint and muscles).
- These structures are composed of a different tissue type than muscle and are not always as amenable to stretching as muscle tissue. It is important to consider that forceful stretching may cause irreparable damage to these structures, with long-term consequences.

4.3 Types of Stretching



There are three main categories of stretching:

- **Dynamic Stretching**
 - Active stretching (recommended)
 - Ballistic stretching (not permitted)
- **Static Stretching**
 - Active stretch/self-stretch (recommended)
 - Passive stretch/partner stretch (not permitted)
- **Precontraction Stretch**
 - PNF stretching (only permitted with a medical professional)

DYNAMIC STRETCHING:

- Active dynamic stretching involves moving the limb through the full available range of motion to the end range and repeating. Active stretching is particularly recommended as a component of the warm-up and has been shown to improve running and jumping performance.
- About 8-12 reps of each active stretch is recommended for each muscle group.
- Ballistic stretching is another component of dynamic stretching, which involves rapid, alternating movements or 'bouncing' at the end range of a motion. As there is an increased risk of injury with ballistic stretching, **it is not permitted** for gymnasts to perform this style of stretching.

STATIC STRETCHING:**1) Stretching Parameters**

- Static stretching involves placing the joint or body part in a specific position, where the muscle is at the point of a stretching sensation (mild pull), holding this position for a period of time, and then repeating.
- For optimal flexibility increases, static stretches should be held for a period of 30 seconds and repeated 2-3 times.
- There is no benefit to holding a static stretch for longer than 30 seconds.
- After the 30 seconds, it is recommended the gymnast comes out of the stretch and then repeats.
- Alternatively, after 30 seconds, the gymnast can proceed deeper into the stretch, as the muscle allows. No pain should be experienced when performing the stretch.
- There is no added benefit observed with performing more than 4 repetitions of a given stretch.
- Static stretches should be performed 3-5 times weekly, with flexibility gains seen after consistent stretching over a 6-8-week period.

2) Stretching Positions

- Static stretching is best performed when the muscle is warm, and the gymnast is relaxed.
- Positions where the gymnast is stable (e.g. on his/her back, sitting, lying) will allow for greater muscle relaxation.
- Positions where the gymnast may struggle for stability will call for muscle activation to help with their balance, with lower ranges of motion achieved as a result.
- Breathing control is also important to maximise flexibility gains. Ask the gymnast to breathe out as they lower into the stretch to ensure full relaxation of the muscle.

3) Self-Stretching vs Partner Stretching

- While static stretching can, in theory, be performed actively by the gymnast themselves, or passively by a coach or a fellow athlete. Self-stretches are only permitted to be performed, with no assistance from a coach or fellow gymnast.
- **Do not use** any form of additional external overpressure with static stretches. Pushing into a painful stretch or excessive overpressure of the stretch can be counterproductive, as the muscle will likely contract to resist the stretch. A contracted muscle will, in turn, limit the range of motion available for the stretch, and will also increase the risk of injury to that muscle.
- With self-stretches, gymnasts can control the depth of the stretch within their tolerance, thereby decreasing the risk of injury due to overly aggressive stretching.

4) Static Stretching and Muscle Performance

- Several studies have shown a brief immediate detrimental effect on muscle strength and running/jumping performance after static stretches.
- This effect is transient, however for this reason, dynamic stretches are preferred over static stretches in a warmup setting.
- For example, asking a gymnast to sit in splits and immediately perform a split jump/leap post the stretch may impede their muscle strength and as such, have a detrimental effect on the skill.

PROPRIOCEPTIVE NEUROMUSCULAR FACILITATION (PNF) STRETCHING:

- PNF stretching can take many forms and includes contract-relax, hold-relax and contract-relax-contrast (opposite muscle group) stretching techniques.

- While PNF stretching has been shown to be effective in increasing muscle length, due to the potential increased risk of injury, it must only be performed under the guidance of a medical professional. Outside of this, gymnasts should self-direct many stretching procedure being undertaken.

ECCENTRIC STRENGTHENING:

- Stretching is not the only method for increasing range of motion. At times, a muscle may be tight because it is weak.
- An 'eccentric' muscle contraction involves a lengthening action of the muscle, often where the muscle must decelerate or lower the load (e.g. lowering yourself into a chair).
- This contrasts with a 'concentric' muscle action, where the muscle shortens (e.g. picking up a weight).
- Recent studies have shown that eccentric strength training simultaneously improves both strength and flexibility of the muscle.
- This combined benefit of stretching and strengthening, in one exercise, makes it a useful tool in a gymnast's programme for increasing range of motion and injury rate reduction.
- Due to these established gains in motor performance, it is advised that gymnasts include an eccentric strengthening component when addressing their flexibility needs.

STRETCHING FOR SPLITS

- When stretching for splits, it is important to remember that gymnasts should always lower into the stretch position slowly and carefully - do not jump into splits.
- Care should be taken to ensure the gymnast holds their splits using the correct technique (hips square, back knee under) to maximise the benefit of the stretch.
- Coaches should ensure that the gymnast's technique and safe positioning of their joints is not compromised for the sake of a 'better' or lower split.
- The end position of the split should be held for 30 seconds, at which time, gymnasts should then come out of the split, before repeating.
- Avoid pushing into pain or bouncing at the end range - instead aim for the stretch sensation, which should feel like a mild pull.
- It is also recommended that gymnasts come out of their split position before changing sides/legs, as this removes any undue stress or strain on the hip and knee joints.
- As with static stretching, consistent gains in splits occur over weeks/months rather than minutes.

OVER-SPLITS

- Over-splits should only be included in the programme of a gymnast who can perform full splits on the floor, with the correct form (hips square and forward, knee turned under).
- The same stretching parameters and guidelines stated for splits are also recommended for over-splits.
- In addition, it is also advised that one of the gymnast's legs is supported on the floor during the over-split position, so the gymnast is not 'hanging' unprotected.
- Any gymnasts working on over-splits should ensure to include hip and core strengthening and stability exercises in their programme. Strength and control through the entire range of motion is necessary for skills such as leaps and jumps, where the split position is performed.

5. Training & Education

The following training is an accessible CPD course for all clubs, coaches, consultants and support staff:

Stretching and Flexibility Enhancement: A Coach's Guide to Stretching Guidelines and Protocols

This CPD course is delivered via the GI eLearning platform and is a requirement for all GI registered Level 2 (or above) coaches and recommended for all GI registered coaches regardless of level.

6. Non-Compliance & Reporting

All members have a duty of care and responsibility to adopt safe practices in all aspects of gymnastics activities in the interest of the health, safety and wellbeing of all those participating. All participants have a right to a positive experience in the sport and to feel protected.

Any instances of non-compliance with the Gymnastics Ireland Stretching Policy can and should be reported to your Club Management in the first instance to ensure the non-compliance can be addressed, and any training or CPD can be immediately implemented. Further non-compliance must be referred to Gymnastics Ireland via the Safe Sport & Integrity Staff. Breaches of this policy may be dealt with in line with the Gymnastics Ireland Complaints & Disciplinary Rules and Procedures.

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CONTACT US

TEL: (+353) 01-625-1125

E-MAIL: ask@gymnasticsireland.com

Gymnastics Ireland

Irish Sports HQ

Sport Ireland Campus

Blanchardstown

Dublin 15

Ireland



Sport Starts Here.

WWW.GYMNASTICSIRELAND.COM

