

Body Image, Nutrition, and Psychological Well-being Among British Gymnasts

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Abstract

Gymnastics is a sport that demands high technical skill and physicality combined with aesthetic presentation — qualities that often intersect with challenges around body image, especially among young athletes navigating puberty and identity formation. This session explores the multifaceted relationship between body image, nutrition, and psychological well-being in British gymnasts, drawing on insights from athletes themselves.

We begin by unpacking the concept of body image and examining why it presents unique challenges in gymnastics. Factors such as age, developmental changes, the subjective nature of judging, and the language used all contribute to how gymnasts perceive their bodies. These perceptions can significantly impact mental health and a gymnast's relationship with food.

Through qualitative reflections and lived experiences shared by gymnasts, we highlight the emotional toll of appearance-based expectations and the internal conflicts they face. The session will also present strategies for reframing body image—shifting the focus from aesthetics to functionality and appreciation of physical capability.

This discussion is essential for anyone supporting any athlete in their journey through sport to ensure they do so with their health and well-being at the core of their progression.