

Parent Guide: Fueling & Supporting Gymnasts Ages 6–15

Fueling Young Gymnasts: A Parent's Guide to Growth, Nutrition & Injury Prevention

Why Fueling Matters

Fueling 8–10-year-old gymnasts isn't about perfection — it's about **steady, sustainable habits** that support their bodies and brains. Kids this age burn energy fast, grow fast, and get full fast. Consistency is a secret weapon.

What Young Gymnasts Need Daily

- **Frequent snacks** (every 2–3 hours)
- **Reliable carbs** for school + training
- **Protein** spread throughout the day
- **Simple, kid-friendly foods**
- **Predictable routines**

Understanding Growth: Ages 6–7

Kids often grow **2–3 inches per year** during this phase. After that, growth slows until puberty.

What to expect:

- Steady growth
- More coordination
- Stable appetite and sleep

Tween to Teen (10–15): The Big Growth Window

Puberty brings rapid changes in height, muscle, hormones, and bone development.

Nutrition Priorities

- **Calories:** 1,400–2,200+ (ages 9–13), 1,800–2,400 (ages 14–18)
- **Carbs:** 50–60% of intake
- **Protein:** eggs, dairy, poultry, beans, tofu
- **Calcium + Vitamin D:** 3 cups dairy/fortified alternatives

- **Iron:** meat, beans, fortified cereals
- **Hydration:** water + electrolytes during long practices

Why Injuries Increase During Growth Spurts

- Bones grow faster than muscles/tendons
- Growth plates are softer and more vulnerable
- Coordination temporarily dips
- Training loads often increase

Common Growth-Related Injuries (Parent-Friendly Breakdown)

Osgood–Schlatter Disease (Knee)

Pain below the kneecap; tender bump; soreness after activity. **Cause:** Fast bone growth + tight tendons. **Care:** Rest, stretching, load management.

Sever’s Disease (Heel)

Pain at the back/bottom of heel; limping; toe-walking. **Cause:** Tight calves + rapid heel growth. **Care:** Supportive shoes, stretching, rest.

Sinding-Larsen-Johansson Syndrome (Lower Kneecap)

Pain at bottom of kneecap; soreness with jumping/sprinting. **Cause:** Tendon tension during fast femur growth. **Care:** Rest, stretching, modified training.

Shin Splints

Achy or sharp shin pain; worse with impact. **Cause:** Overuse + tight tissues + growth. **Care:** Rest, supportive shoes, gradual return.

Growth Plate Irritation

Pain near joints; swelling; tenderness. **Cause:** Overuse or impact on soft growth plates. **Care:** Rest, load management, medical eval if severe.

SCFE (Serious Hip Condition)

Hip/groin/knee pain; limping; stiffness. **Cause:** Weak hip growth plate slipping. **Care:** Medical evaluation needed.

How Parents Can Support Their Athlete

- Offer meals/snacks every 3–4 hours

- Prioritize carbs + protein
- Encourage sleep
- Watch for persistent pain
- Communication with coaches
- Normalize rest days